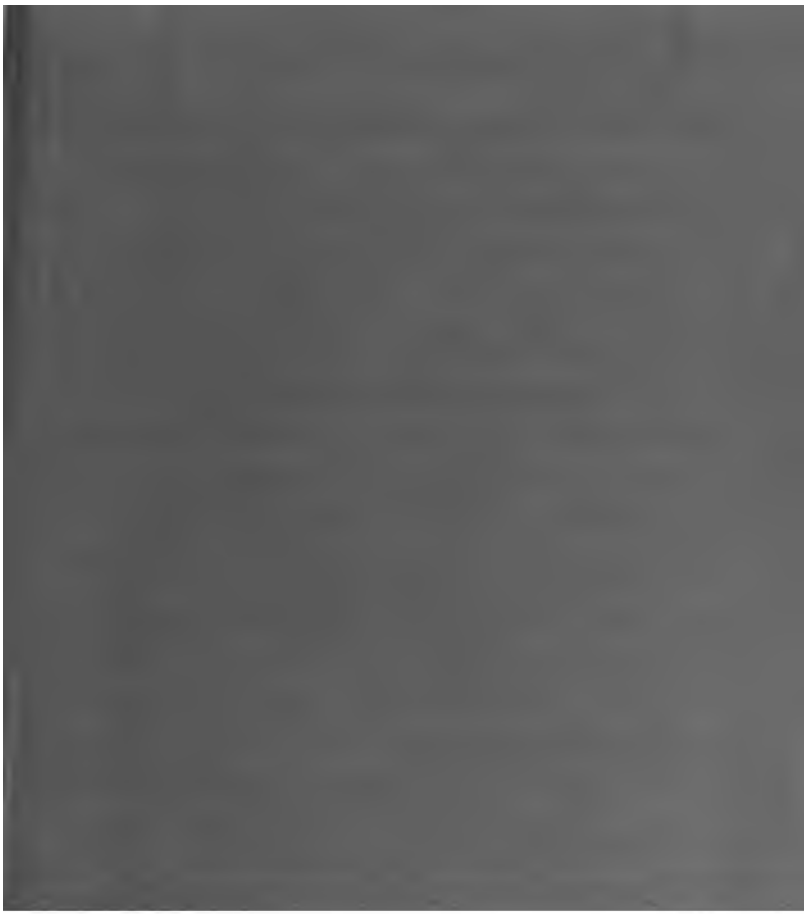

THE HEAVIEST PIPE

The Heaviest Pipe

A Story of Mystery and Adventure

Written By
ARTHUR M. PATTERSON

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

To

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

CONTENTS

The Heaviest Pipe

CHAPTER I

A PECULIAR REQUEST

THE postman whistled cheerily into the little office, and dropped a long envelope upon one end of the flat-topped desk. Behind the desk, in a rickety swivel chair, sat a young man morosely sucking upon a lead pencil. His face lightened up a bit, however, at the salutation of the freckle-faced little Irishman, whose official cap was tipped jauntily to one side over hair that was fully as auburn as even a light complexion could permit.

"That all to-day, Moriarty?" he asked.

"Faith, Mr. Somers, an' ain't ye the lucky man?" responded the other. "Ye're clane forgettin' it be the foist o' the month—an' me ould back bowed with carryin' bills an' dunnin' letters into ivery place on the street. Thinks I to meself: but there's young Mr. Somers now, in Room 24. Not a bill nor a dun does the lad draw the day; only a big, thick envelope—that shure looks loike good green money in ivery corner of

ut. It's a wonder, says I, that folks don't always send them kind registered."

The good-natured, smiling little carrier passed out into the corridor, and paused at the foot of the stairs for breath, before commencing the climb of another flight in the great office building. He wiped his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief already wet from previous usage, the spring day being very hot.

"God forgive me for a cheerful kidder," he whispered to himself; "but I might at that have heartened the boy up, just a bit. Shure he's as gloomy as a teetotaler at a wake, an' no wonder. The janitor tells me his rint is behind a full month—they'll be servin' a dispossess on him soon, poor lad. O' course he ain't getting dunnin' letters; his creditors is gone by that stage; it is writs they'll be usin' now, an' praise the saints I don't carry them."

Then the old letter carrier—he was long in the service though his hair showed not a trace of white—aroused himself from his musing with a start.

"But faith, Uncle Sam don't pa-ay me for moonin' to meself in these hallways. If I stop to worry over ivery strugglin' young lawyer in the city, I'll have no time at all for me regular dooties." And he started briskly up the iron stairs, sorting over the letters in his leather bag as he went.

Back in Room 24, Chick Somers,—the "Chick" was short for Chichester, a name he detested—broke

open the flap of his one letter with a stubby forefinger. Like the carrier, he was thinking aloud; it is surprising how many people fall into that habit when alone.

"I hoped Brooks would come across to-day, but nothing doing. I don't dare send him another bill; can't afford to anger the only good client I've got. But if he don't send me a check soon I won't even have an office, worse luck." He had slit the envelope down, but before taking out its enclosure he turned it over and regarded the postmark again.

"Sanoset, Maine; now, hang it, that sounds familiar. But I've never been in the burgh, and surely I don't owe anybody down that way." He leaned back in his chair, brows wrinkled in thought. At the back of his brain there hovered a faint recollection, evading his busily working memory. At length he straightened up with a grin.

"Why sure, that's where mother's Uncle Rowland lived. She used to get letters from that place, I remember. But that old codger must be dead years ago, or else tremendously aged. Why, he must be close on to ninety, at the least." He looked at the neatly typed envelope once again before taking out the letter inside. "Wonder where they got my address," he said, as he finally opened it.

Within was a sheet of good bond, with a legal heading engraved in heavy black letters across the top.

The letter beneath the heading was brief and to the point, and its typed words left Somers staring at the page in plain, open-mouthed surprise. The letter read curtly:

CHICHESTER SOMERS, ESQ.,
Attorney-at-Law,
Room 24, Barridale Building,
Boston, Massachusetts.

Dear Sir:

Having obtained your address from the office of your University, I am writing to inform you that your great-uncle (on mother's side) Captain Rowland Bridger, died upon the 25th of last month, leaving a will of which I am named executor, and in which you, as his sole surviving relative, are beneficiary. With the exception of a few minor bequests, you will inherit his entire estate, roughly valued at some twenty thousand dollars.

As his executor I have taken the initial steps necessary in the probating of said will; but it will be necessary for you to come on to Sanoset at an early date to assist in the settling of various matters. Will you kindly advise me as to when I may expect you?

Yours very truly,
SKILAYTON RAY.

"Well, I'll be knocked on the head," said Somers, after a minute, and very solemnly. "Twenty thousand dollars. I wish this Skilayton Ray had advanced a couple of twenties; 'twould make it a whole lot easier for me to get down to the place. It's the money question with me, Mr. Skilayton Ray, that decides when

I may expect to confer with you. My affairs would permit of my going this minute."

Then as the full import of the news struck home, the young man jumped to his feet and engaged in a wild dance strongly resembling the popular conception of an Indian war-dance, the letter which he waved wildly over his head taking the place of a flourishing tomahawk. His evolutions about the narrow floor space only terminated when he jostled against his single bookcase with a crash, knocking heavily to the ground two thick volumes of the Cyclopedia of Law that were piled on its top. The books not only struck the floor with considerable noise, but very narrowly missed the toes of a thin-faced gentleman with graying hair who pushed open the door at the moment. This gentleman jumped back with celerity, meanwhile shooting a scowling glance at the exuberant Somers.

"I don't suppose you've stopped to consider that there are other tenants in the building," he remarked in an icy voice, but his sarcasm was completely lost on Somers at such a moment.

"Hulloa, Mr. Barridale," he boomed at his caller; "come in and rejoice with me. Here, take that chair." He picked a pile of dusty manuscripts from the indicated seat, and whirled it across the floor in Barridale's direction. But as that gentleman made no effort to stop it, the chair crashed into the corner behind the door, knocking over a waste-basket, and bringing up

on its back with a splintering noise that indicated the breaking of an already uncertain leg.

Mr. Barridale, owner of the Barridale Building and several other equally profitable pieces of city real estate, was one of those eccentric gentlemen who preferred the collecting of his own rents, and the handling of his own property, rather than the employing of an agent for such purposes. Such economy may be laudable, but when, as in Mr. Barridale's case, too close attention personally to the minor details of his business scarce gave him time to attend to its larger phases, much less to find leisure for the ordinary enjoyments and pastimes of life, the average person might well have termed him stingy and miserly, and not been far wrong. However, he believed in keeping his property in the best of repair, and so long as his tenants paid regularly was a reasonably good landlord.

He now produced from a pocket a black covered receipt book, from which he extracted two white slips and held them out toward Somers. They were the bills for office-rent, one for the month now due, the other for the past month and overdue.

"Say, I can't do anything to-day, on either of those," said Somers frankly. "I'm sorry, but I haven't a blessed red in my clothes, hardly. But I just got this letter which says—well, you might as well look it over;" he handed the sheet in his hand to Barridale. That gentleman took it, adjusted his

glasses, and read it through without the slightest change of expression. Having finished he laid it down upon the desk top, together with the two rent slips.

"It appears to be authentic," he remarked. "I should say quite a convenient legacy to inherit, just at this time." He glanced rather significantly around the cheaply furnished little office. "Well, Mr. Somers, this puts a slightly different face on the matter. If you will promise to send me a check at your earliest opportunity, I will allow you to remain in this office. Let me wish you a pleasant trip to Sanoset; for I assume you will go down at the first opportunity. Good-day, sir." He went out as silently as he had come in.

"Makes a difference," soliloquized Somers. "I'd have gone out sure as shooting if it hadn't been for this letter. Not that I can blame him any—it's only business. Now for a raising of the funds."

He took a rather shabby hat from the little closet, and passed out, locking the door behind him. Five minutes' walk through the rather intricate streets of the old portion of the city brought him out upon Tremont Street by the Park Street Church. The warmth of the spring day had sent thousands of people out into the streets; the near-by Common was black with them. Somers decided to stroll down the Mall; it was only a little further that way to his room, which was just off Charles Street, nearly at the foot of Beacon Hill.

As he passed down the Mall and under its stately elms, he was buried in a reverie that was only interrupted when a hand timidly plucked his sleeve. Somers turned, expecting to see the grinning face of some newsboy; for the little fellows thronged thick in the vicinity at the moment crying the evening editions of the papers which were just out. But it was a woman who had taken hold of his sleeve; neither was she of the type who make a practice of borrowing carfare or lunch money on the plea of a lost pocketbook, always with promises to pay that somehow never seem to mature. Somers noticed, even in his abstraction, that she had a worried look upon her face; further that she was dressed apparently in traveling costume, and carried a suit-case in one gloved hand. Whether she was pretty or even stylishly costumed he could not have said; for as yet he was deep in his own thoughts;—but the three facts of suit-case, traveling suit and worried expression would have been apparent even to the most unobserving person. Mechanically he lifted his hat.

"You'll pardon me, sir," she said in a low, hurried voice. "May I speak with you for just a moment?"

Somers saw that she was considerably agitated, and very nervous. Even as she spoke to him her eyes were roaming restlessly over the faces of all who passed; almost as if she was looking for some one or other in the crowd.

"Why certainly, madam," he replied, taking her by the arm and drawing her out of the line of passers-by.

"I hardly know how to begin. Really I'm almost completely upset. Perhaps you'll almost think I'm crazy, when I tell you—oh, I don't know how to begin." She was biting her lower lip as if in a desperate effort to maintain her self-control. Somers felt sorry for her, and his remark was made without particular thought, and for the purpose of helping to put her at her ease.

"Take your time, madam; I am in no hurry. I assure you I am quite at your service."

"If you only meant that," she returned quickly—considerably to his surprise. "And I am in a hurry, a desperate hurry—as well as in terrible trouble."

"Just what is the matter?" asked Somers, after a minute of silence. She did not reply, but suddenly clutched his arm, and so forced him to walk along by her side, back in the direction from which he had just come.

"Please come along, just as though you had expected to meet me," she exclaimed, and pushed over the suit-case. "And take this;—naturally they would expect to see you carrying it."

Somers hardly knew what to say or do—and in his amazement he allowed her to push him along for several steps before he found his voice. The suit-case that she had put into his hand was very heavy—as

though full of books, he thought. Yet the young woman had seemed to carry it with ease—it flashed through his mind that she must be very strong, though she seemed but a slight, little thing.

"Where are we going?" he finally managed to say.

"Oh, hurry, hurry," she repeated, quickening her own steps. "I haven't time to explain now; we must hurry. Can't we get a taxi somewhere?"

"Plenty of them," replied Somers. In fact at that moment there were two drawn up in the near-by street, their indicators showing they were unengaged. "It's the paying for them that would bother me, just now," he continued, rather red in the face at the confession.

She did not seem to notice his confusion.

"Oh, I pay, of course," she said, and opening her bag she drew out several crumpled bills and pressed them into his hand. "Tell him to drive to the Bangor boat." Bewildered he hailed the taxi as she had bidden, and assisted her into it. Even as he climbed in behind, the driver hastily threw his car into gear, bumping Somers back hard against the narrow seat.

"What the dev —— I mean what's the fellow in such a hurry for?" he asked in surprise.

"I suppose he thinks we haven't much time," she replied, consulting the little watch at her wrist. "The boat leaves at five, and it's ten minutes of five now. By the way," and now her face was a rich crimson. "I was so excited that I forgot to ask you back

there in the Mall. But you're not married, are you?"

Somers stared at her, thinking surely now that she must be out of her head. But though her cheeks were still flushed she continued to look at him steadily. The taxi was bumping around corners and over cobbles in its driver's haste to reach the dock on time; and consequently the two were thrown almost into each other's arms. Finally he shook his head. The girl looked relieved.

"And can you go to Maine with me? I know it sounds preposterous, but can you? I'll make it all right with your firm, or wherever you work. But can you?" There was almost an imploring note in her voice.

"But I haven't any money," began Somers. "No overcoat, no suit-case, nothing to travel with. It's ——"

She shut him off, raising one hand to tap upon the glass to the chauffeur. He looked around and drew up his car at her signal, its engine still throbbing.

"There's a clothing store right there," she cried. "Hurry. Buy an overcoat—anything; you've money enough there in your hand."

Probably it was the quickest transaction that ever took place in that furnishing store. It left the amazed clerk staring at two yellow-backed bills in his hand—probably wondering whether or not they were counter-

feit—while Somers was dashing back to the taxi, forcing his shoulders into the coat as he ran. The girl was talking to the chauffeur.

"We must make it," she told him. "Five dollars if you do."

"Aw right, lady," he cried back, over his shoulder. "Hold tight, youse two."

And make it they did, though the big boat's whistle was booming as he pulled up at the edge of the dock. The girl flung a bill at the grinning driver—doubtless he imagined the affair an elopement. Somers seized the heavy suit-case and arm in arm they ran through the crowd upon the slippery dock, in the direction of a gangway just about to be hauled in. He had the impression that another taxi had dashed up to the curb, only a moment behind their own car. Also it flashed through his mind that he was undoubtedly making an ass of himself. People in the crowd were laughing; a red-faced officer in uniform, at the foot of the gangplank, was grinning also.

"All right, sir," he cried, as they came dashing up. "We held the plank for ye. Here, madam." He seized the lady by her free arm, and together the three of them ascended the great railed gangway on the run. Even as their feet struck upon it, the dock-hands were hauling it in with the heavy ropes; for the great steamer had fairly started. Somers could hear the sound of confusion, also of excited voices upon the

wharf behind. There was a loud laughing in the crowd at something.

As they turned in the gangway, Somers looked back and saw two men who had forced their way through the crowd on the wharf, and were now standing dangerously near the edge of the big pier. One of them was a nondescript fellow, of average height and dress, but the other, as he stood there, raving and swearing, close to the edge of the slippery wharf, made a picture the young lawyer never forgot. The man was a gigantic fellow; with long, reddish whiskers, parted in the middle and waving in the breeze; and a great, tangled wig or mop of uncombed hair, that bushed out all around the velvet edges of his Alpine hat. Upon his nose he wore eye-glasses, pulled down so that his light-blue and bloodshot eyes looked over the thick lense tops; and his mouth, now twisted in a look of awful rage, contained as perfect a set of strong and well-kept teeth as you very often see. He shook his hands, in one of which he was swinging a grotesque little cane above his head, and shouted something that Somers could not hear above the noise of the departure.

The girl—she could have been little more than twenty—had released Somers' arm; but though she stood alone, yet she still breathed in agitated fashion, and there was more than a suspicion of tears in her deep eyes. In the confusion all about them, of hurry-

ing passengers and stewards, the latter bustling with bags or bundles, while the former were already lining before the purser's window, they were unnoticed for the time being.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me what this all means?" said Somers. He was sufficiently out of the bewildered stage, in which he had allowed the girl to sweep him unresistingly along as she willed, so that he realized what a foolish, preposterous, and utterly unheard-of thing he had been led into. Yet certainly this girl did not look like an adventuress, as Somers mentally conceived such women to be; having never had any acquaintance with one in his normal young life.

"In a minute," said the girl, so low he had to stoop in order to hear her words. "But you'd better engage our staterooms now. And do you mind putting down, when you give our names, that I am your wife?"

"I'm completely scoopered," exclaimed Somers, an expression he had used since childhood, when taken aback. "Where, then, are we going?" And at her answer he dropped the suit-case; for his surprise was now complete.

"Oh, you might as well book them clear through," she answered wearily. "But I'm going to Sanoset."

CHAPTER II

A MAKE-BELIEVE HONEYMOON

SOMERS was the last one in line before the purser's window, and the long sheet upon which the officer was entering the names of the passengers was nearly full, when it came his turn at the little, barred opening. The officer looked at him inquiringly, pen already poised over the foot of his column. With a long breath Somers took his first real plunge into the sea of deception, and found its temperature not nearly so cold as he had expected.

"Mr. and Mrs. Chichester, Boston," he told the purser. For the first time in his life almost he found his Christian name of actual use; it did not make a bad surname at all, he reflected.

"Initials, sir?" queried the purser. Here was a poser, and Somers hesitated for the least fraction of a second. It was the inscription upon the officer's cap, "E. S. C.," presumably standing for Eastern Steamship Company, that gave him his idea.

"E. S.," he answered hastily, as the thought struck him. Bright idea number two. So long at least as he

traveled upon this boat, he would not be apt to forget his assumed name.

"Two tickets for, eh, Bangor," he went on, remembering that city to be the steamer's destination. He knew in a vague way that she made other ports upon the trip; but had no faintest idea of the names of such places. Except for a Sunday excursion to Old Orchard, which he never thought of without painful recollections, Somers had never been into the state of Maine, and knew no more of its geography than he did of that of South Africa or Indo-China.

"Stateroom, of course," said the purser, his pen scratching busily but without looking up. Perhaps it was fortunate he did not do so at the moment, for Somers colored more vividly than would a bashful schoolboy at his first formal dance.

"Yes, yes," he said, somewhat confusedly. "Two —two inside rooms." The officer looked up with an air of polite surprise, as if he had not quite understood.

"Two inside rooms, sir?"

"Yes," snapped Somers, rather crossly. "I suppose you have two unengaged rooms, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," replied the purser, with what the agitated Somers fancied a sardonic smile about the corners of his mouth. "Plenty of staterooms at this season, Mr. Chichester. Later on, when the summer business commences, they are booked pretty well ahead."

With his tickets and change the young lawyer returned to the girl, who now passed as Mrs. E. S. Chichester. A grinning darky stood by to carry the luggage, and Somers looked at the keys marked with the numbers of his staterooms, 21 and 23. He pointed out the suit-case to the steward, and started up the brass-railed staircase with his companion. As the negro lifted the bag he exclaimed to himself in surprise; but both Somers and the girl overheard his muttered words.

"Golly me; I wondah if that gemman's got this yeah bag full of bricks. It's as heavy as a trunk."

As they reached the top of the staircase which led into the long carpeted cabin, that ran nearly the length of the stateroom deck, with the doors of the inside staterooms opening along its gleaming white walls, Somers' eyes fell upon a man buried in one of the big cabin chairs, and immersed in the most sensational of the evening papers; its character plainly indicated by the staring, red-inked headlines. The young lawyer quickly turned his head away as much as was possible, and attempted to jerk his companion past the sitting man so suddenly that she stared in surprise. But his purpose was frustrated; at the very minute of passing the man looked up, and sprang to his feet, flinging down his paper.

"My dear Somers," he began, coming forward with eager hand outstretched; then, as he grasped the fact

that Somers was accompanied by a young woman, he stopped in some confusion, a look of embarrassment stealing over his face. "I beg your pardon ——" he half began to say, when Somers desperately plunged in to save the situation.

"Why, hulloa, Dick, old fellow," he returned in a tone that he strove to make hearty. "What are you doing on this boat? Oh, and meet my wife, Mrs. Chi ——" Somers remembered just in time and finished rather lamely, "Mrs. Chick Somers. This is Dickie Tarbox."

Tarbox shook hands with the girl, but his face wore a look of distinct—if well-bred—surprise; and no wonder. Only two days before he had spent a couple of hours in Somers' office; at which time his old college classmate had made no mention of the fact that he had taken unto himself a wife.

"See you in a minute, Dickie," Somers rushed on. "Just wait until I put my wife in her room." He fairly pulled the girl into the doorway of number 21, which was quite near by. There, when the steward had been dismissed with his fee, the two stood, looking helplessly at each other. Somers spoke first.

"Of all the luck," he said forcibly—"to run into Dick Tarbox like this. I don't know what he'll think."

"Who is Mr. Tarbox?" inquired the girl, curiously.

"Why, the best friend I've got in the world, that's

all. We roomed together in college. He's in the real estate business with his father—Tarbox and Tarbox—if you live in the city you must know of the firm. I see Dickie almost every week—by all good rights he'd naturally expect to be best man at my wedding, let alone knowing about it. I don't know what he can be thinking, just now."

"I'm awfully sorry," said the girl. "But can't you tell him something or other, for the time being? Of course if ——"

He interrupted her. "Of course I've got to say something. Though I'm not a very accomplished liar; especially on the spur of the moment. But if you mean that I won't go through with this thing, now I've started, forget it, please." She smiled just a little, probably at the slang of which he was totally unconscious; but a relieved look spread over her face. "You'll excuse me, just now," he hurried on. "I must see Dickie. Your explanations to me will have to be postponed a little."

Hurrying back to his friend, Somers' brain revolved a half dozen reasons that he might put forth for his sudden plunge into matrimony; none of them at all plausible. And while he trusted Tarbox like a brother, it was manifestly impossible that he tell him the true situation; especially when he did not understand it himself. His old chum awaited him, a rather hurt look upon his clear-cut features.

"I say, old man," Tarbox began. "Is this using a chap just right? I don't want to butt in on your affairs, of course; but seems as though you might have told me you were going to be married."

"I know, I know," returned Somers. "But just listen to a fellow a minute, will you?" An idea had come to him. "I've really been married quite a while. Secret marriage, you see;—I'd have told you, of course, but we just couldn't tell anybody for a while. I'll explain the whole thing later, when I can. And I'll have to ask you to keep the secret with us, for a little longer time; until it's all right for everybody to know. You see it's a sort of family affair—opposition, you know, and all that." Somers raised his hand, shaking it in a vague gesture.

"Well, I'll be hanged," exploded Tarbox. "And old stick-in-the-mud Chick Somers at that! The logical, lawyer chap! If it had been Guffy, or Burleyson or Gaffer, or even Tiddledy-winks Sanborn, I shouldn't bat an eye. But you—mixed up with Romance!" He flung up both hands and laughed, perhaps a trifle boisterously, as if to cover some sentiment he did not care to show. Somers flushed.

"Romance be hanged," he replied. "It's a matter-of-fact enough thing; wait till I can explain and you'll see." But he knew that his face would show the lie too apparent, and so his eyes rested upon the thick carpet under their feet. For the first time in their

long acquaintance he could not look his friend straight in the eyes.

"But what are you doing on this boat?" he hurried on. "It's too early for your vacation; and you go to the Adirondacks anyway for that, I suppose."

"Oh, just a little business trip," said the other carelessly. "Not such a small affair either, though. In fact I wouldn't be here at all if father hadn't sprained an ankle jumping from the car this noon; and I had to hustle some things into a bag and come along in his place. A rather big deal for one of our clients; he wants to take over a tract of land on the coast, down in Maine, without appearing himself in the transaction. Consequently it's to be a cash deal. Why, Chick, do you know," he dropped his voice to a cautious whisper, "I've got twenty thousand dollars in clean money, locked up in a bag down in the purser's safe. And instructions to use the whole of it to swing the deal, if necessary."

Dickie Tarbox had one great fault, as his intimates had always known, and as Somers realized at the moment. He was apt to talk a little too freely, and concerning affairs of a strictly confidential nature. In this case, as Somers reflected, it made no particular difference that Tarbox had told him of the deal and the money. But his good-hearted, though garrulous, old chum was quite apt to make a confidant of anybody upon the boat with whom he should exchange a

conversation of any length. Somers conceived it to be his duty to keep a close watch over his friend so long as they were together upon the steamer; even if in so doing he had to neglect his—er—wife a little. Though very likely, under all the circumstances, she did not particularly care for his company—he was simply necessary to enable her to carry out some scheme of which he at the present time knew nothing. Down in her heart, though probably grateful for his kindness, she must think him a gullible fool to allow himself to be dragged into such a situation. Not for a minute, however, did he allow himself to think there was anything at all off color in the particular matter in which she had invoked his aid.

"I say, old fellow," broke in Tarbox. "Why so thoughtful? I've heard that matrimony sobers a man considerably, but you needn't be as glum as the proverbial oyster; at least when you're in my company. And if the madam doesn't object to——" he tossed back his head, opened his mouth, and went through the motions of raising and tossing off a glass; "why then let's seek the palace of refreshment. I suppose there must be such a place somewhere on the boat."

Somers hesitated a moment. A bottle or so of beer could do no harm, he thought; and after the rather exciting events of the last hour, perhaps he stood in need of even a stronger beverage, in the nature of that

which is slangily called a bracer. So he nodded his head in assent, while that happy-go-lucky and impetuous whirlwind of a Tarbox hailed an ebony attendant, and flipped a coin that the white-jacketed fellow caught dexterously.

"Yassah, boss. The bar's right down forward, on lower deck; off freight deck, sah. Right down them stairs for'd, and tu'n off where they's hosses an' ca'iages put—in through the li'l door there, sah."

"Devil of a place to put a bar," growled Tarbox, who had been accustomed to find the place of liquid refreshment in more convenient and accessible locations when he traveled by water. He did not take into consideration that upon most coasting steamers there is not the distinction of first cabin, second cabin, and steerage. One either buys a stateroom or not, as he prefers or as his pocket allows; and it requires no cabin ticket to eat in the dining saloon. Thus there was one bar, which was open to all, no matter their class or distinction.

Eventually and without much trouble in locating it, the young men found themselves in a little room where a bored steward set out the bottles and glasses required, and was not averse to a drink himself upon invitation. In the far corner of the room, while the steward waited upon other thirsty passengers, Somers took occasion to caution his friend upon over talkativeness; but without much impression on Tarbox.

"Sure, Chick; I'll be mum as an owl. Though what's the harm anyway; the money's safely locked up in the purser's safe."

"I know it is, just now. But you've got to take it out some time. And suppose the wrong people found out you had it, and followed you from the boat—they might be able to make things decidedly unpleasant for you."

"Oh, that's all right," answered Tarbox loftily. "Don't worry about me, Chick. I hope you don't think those people down around Sanoset can put anything over on me. Why, what's the matter, old man?" For Somers had taken the glass from his lips with such suddenness that the liquid within it was slopped all over his coat. However he regained his presence of mind immediately.

"Must be getting outside the harbor," he returned. "And I haven't my sea legs, I guess. When the boat rolled then I almost lost my balance." As a matter of fact the steamer was ploughing along through a dead calm sea and without so much as a quiver; but the excuse passed with the unobserving Tarbox.

"I didn't notice," he answered. "But these coast steamers do roll awfully in any kind of a sea. No draught to speak of, you know; they're built to sail up rivers and into shallow harbors."

Somers made no reply; apparently he was giving strict attention to his beer. In reality he was thinking

rapidly. Things seemed to be complicated indeed. Five hours before he had hardly heard of Sanoset; except that he remembered the name vaguely as that of a town where a great-uncle lived whom he had never seen, or heard from directly. It now appeared that the uncle had left him a neat little legacy, making it necessary for him to go down to Sanoset to obtain it. Under peculiar circumstances a young woman had implored his aid in a matter of which he knew nothing, and her destination was Sanoset—certainly a rather strange coincidence. And now Dick Tarbox, his best friend in the city and his comrade in the old school days, was going into Maine upon an important and apparently a rather mysterious errand, and his terminus was Sanoset also. Naturally enough he wondered whether the Tarbox business there could relate in any way to that of the woman's; it certainly seemed improbable, for she seemed principally anxious to get away from somebody, probably the individuals of whom he had caught a brief glimpse as the steamer left the dock in Boston. Well, no doubt she would give him an understanding of the situation at her first opportunity; now he determined to pump the ingenuous Tarbox; ordinarily not a difficult task. But to his surprise the usually guileless fellow froze into silence at the first leading question. Perhaps he thought he had already told too much. All that Somers could glean was the fact that his friend was to

negotiate for some tract or other of coast land, presumably somewhere in Sanoset township, but exact location and dimensions not mentioned. Even assuming the town to be a growing summer resort, Somers could not conceive a tract of land within its borders, unless of immense proportions indeed, to be worth any such sum as Tarbox had mentioned. For twenty thousand dollars in cold cash you can buy a deal of land, and many buildings, in the average country place. Why, that was almost the amount of his great-uncle's entire fortune; and Somers shrewdly suspected that Captain Rowland Bridger had been Sanoset's wealthiest citizen.

"Did you notice the excitement on the dock, just as the steamer sailed?" he asked. His desire partly was to change the subject of conversation; but partly also to discover whether or not Tarbox had noticed the mad rush Somers and his fair companion had been forced to make in order not to miss the boat.

"I wasn't on deck," returned Tarbox, plainly without much interest, and pouring a fresh bottle of beer into his tall glass. "What was it?"

"Why, nothing much. Couple of fellows missed the boat. Sort of funny looking chap—one of them; big fellow with long red whiskers. Seemed to be in a rage over something, maybe because he was just too late." Somers stopped, remembering all at once that very possibly the man he was describing had been in

pursuit of the girl and himself. In which case the less said about it the better. To his surprise Tarbox was leaning forward now, keen interest depicted in every line of his countenance.

"Big fellow with red whiskers, you say? Did they sort of part in the middle, and did he have eye-glasses pulled down low on his nose—so he looked over them, you know?"

Somers nodded. Distinctly he remembered the light-blue, bloodshot eyes staring over the thick lenses.

"Well, I'll be hanged," said Tarbox, setting down his glass untouched and apparently forgotten. "Why wasn't I on deck instead of hived up in that confounded cabin? Probably he wanted to see me; some message maybe. Say, steward, is there a wireless on this boat?" The man nodded.

"Then excuse me," shouted Tarbox excitedly, diving for the door. In his haste he had forgotten his caution of speech, for when the startled Somers called after him as to what was the matter, he flung back over his shoulder, "That was the fellow I'm going to act for down in Maine. Perhaps he's sending new instructions—by wireless, so long as he didn't see me."

Somers followed, determined to confer with the lady now passing as Mrs. Chichester at the first opportunity; while the stolid looking steward, perhaps reflecting

upon the good luck that occasionally falls to one in this queer old world, gathered up two bottles of untouched beer and promptly drank them off, as an appetizer to the supper shortly forthcoming.

CHAPTER III

TWO MESSAGES BY WIRELESS

THE young woman in stateroom 21 was plainly in an agitated state of mind. This was apparent from her perturbed manner and disturbed countenance. Occasionally she would rise from her seat and pace rapidly up and down the narrow room for a minute, then drop again into her chair, and sigh to herself wearily. In the lower berth lay an unopened suit-case, partly hidden by the coat and hat thrown carelessly over it. But it was easy to see, had any one been there to notice, that the girl in the trim blue traveling skirt and the dark silk waist that matched it to perfection, never for any length of time took her eyes away from the locked suit-case; though certainly there was no one in the immediate vicinity to meddle with the thing.

Presently, as the room darkened, she clicked on the little electric bulb in the wall. Hardly had she done so, and returned to her seat beside the lower berth, when there was a low knock at the door. She rose quickly to her feet, not exactly startled by the summons, but evidently a trifle disturbed.

"Who is it?" she asked, approaching the door slowly.

"Why, it's me—Somers," replied the man outside, using the ungrammatical phrase that slips so easily to our lips in answer to just such questions, and which gives absolutely no information in itself. But in this case he had qualified it with his name, and besides she recognized the voice. She turned the key in the lock, and the young man entered; a trifle surprised, perhaps, at finding the door locked when the occupant of the room was within; though he made no comment. The woman retreated to her chair, while the man stood looking down at her.

"I come after a bit of information, Miss, eh ——" and he hesitated. "You know my name, of course, since Dick blurted it out when he met me. But on the passenger list we are down as Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Chichester;—Chichester happens to be my Christian name." He stopped. The girl smiled nervously.

"Then why not call me Mrs. Chichester, for the time being?" she asked. "Or no, that would hardly do either; well then, I was christened Hildegarde. But my friends all call me Gardy, for short—so perhaps my husband had better." The little, half-timorous smile died out swiftly, and she became entirely serious the next moment. "But of course, if you booked yourself as Chichester, you've cautioned your friend not to call you Somers. A few times of that, in the

way he booms your name the length of the boat, would make the purser suspicious."

"I know it," groaned Somers. "And I was a fool not to give my own name. I don't suppose the purser cares a rap, so long as he can identify the people with the names on his list anyway. But you see, eh, well, I just couldn't put my real name down as being a married man, of course."

"It makes little difference," she observed, in practical fashion. "But perhaps, at least before your friend, you'd better call me Gardy, and I'll call you,—what is it, yes—Chick." Again she smiled, very quickly; and the man saw two rows of flashing teeth, and also observed that her mouth curved most adorably when she laughed. "He wouldn't expect to find us too formal," she finished.

"Very well then," said Somers. "Neither do I wish to ask for information until you're ready to give it. But if those people who came on the wharf in Boston, just as the boat sailed, are connected with you in any way, then I think you ought to know that my friend, Tarbox, is acting for one of them in a big real estate deal down in Sanoset, where you're going. I mean the big fellow with the red whiskers, who appeared to be in a rage."

Plainly the girl was interested. She came to her feet with a little startled cry.

"Dear me," she exclaimed; "are you sure? Then

mother must have told him, of course." Evidently she referred to the man with red whiskers.

"Well, it must be quite a big thing," ventured Somers, more mystified than before. "Dick told me he had twenty thousand dollars to swing this deal, and instructions to use the whole amount if necessary. That's Dick's one trouble—sometimes he talks too much."

"Twenty thousand dollars," the girl fairly gasped. "Why, that must have taken all the money the professor had." She sank limply down upon the berth. "But what good would the island do him, when I've got the ——" she stopped short. What she might have gone on to say Somers did not know, for at that moment somebody knocked upon the door, and they heard Tarbox's cheerful voice.

"Pardon me, but you're in there, aren't you, Chick? Just thought I'd remind you that supper's nearly over, and I'll eat with you people, if I may, when you're ready to go down."

Somers looked inquiringly at his companion—after a second's hesitation she nodded.

"I'll be ready directly," she whispered; "just wait for me outside."

As he stepped out into the cabin he found Tarbox pacing up and down, with rather an aggrieved look upon his face. He smiled ruefully at Somers, then burst forth impetuously.

"Funny how people think a young chap can't be trusted with anything important, isn't it? I suppose you run up against the same feeling in your line."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Somers.

"Read that," exclaimed Tarbox, thrusting out the form upon which wireless messages are transcribed when received. "The old boy didn't lose any time in sending it, after he missed the boat. He found father couldn't come himself, and I guess he thinks I can't swing the thing alone."

The message read curtly:

D. TARBOX:
Do nothing until further instructions coming personally.

GIBBS.

"Don't that beat drum-sticks," continued Tarbox, laughing but annoyed. "Why, it's only buying a point of land, and a little island. For a summer place, I presume. I imagine those people down there would fall all over themselves to sell, at a good deal less than twenty thousand dollars. Though we haven't been able to do anything with old Ray by mail."

Somers could not restrain a slight start of surprise. Ray, why that must be Skilayton Ray, the lawyer who was executor of his great-uncle's will, and whose letter now reposed in his inside pocket. However, no doubt Ray was the only lawyer in Sanoset, and prob-

ably handled the legal affairs of the whole community. And like many country lawyers he doubtless dabbled in real estate. Still it was another link in a chain made up of rather peculiar coincidences. He ventured another question.

"Ray? Who is that; the man who has this land to sell?"

"Oh, no. He's simply the lawyer who represents the owners." Tarbox very likely would have said more, for he was in one of his confidential strains, but there was an interruption. And the young real estate man was positively staring, over Somers' shoulder, at the girl who had come out of stateroom 21; so a little perplexed by his friend's attitude, Somers whirled quickly upon his heel. His jaw dropped perceptibly, also. For it hardly seemed possible she was the demure little maiden of the blue traveling suit, and the little dark hat half-covered by a dark veil. In the comparatively short time since he had left the stateroom, she had slipped into a gown of soft messaline, old rose in color, and while not an evening gown certainly, yet cut low enough to display a superb neck and a little bit of white and enticing shoulders. Her dark brown hair was piled in heavy masses upon her head, but with half a dozen stray, refractory curls stealing down to flirt with the little dimples in the curves of the white shoulders. She was certainly what Tarbox proclaimed her, under his breath—"A stun-

ning looking woman." People usually do not dress for dinner upon these boats, consequently other passengers—not alone of the male sex—were staring at the girl, but she seemed serenely unconscious of their scrutiny. Her bearing was perfect, thought Somers, as she smilingly approached the two young men. She might well have been a gracious hostess, greeting a few old friends in the seclusion of a quiet dining-room; —so he told himself and admiringly. What centuries of breeding and good manners were behind her, he wondered, to give that poise which comes to the great lady naturally; and by the actress, if she be a good mimic of emotions, is sometimes acquired.

As she preceded them down the stairway that led to the dining-room, the irrepressible Tarbox found a chance to whisper in Somers' ear. "By Jove, old chap, you're to be congratulated," he exclaimed. "I don't blame you a bit for taking marriage vows." Tarbox enjoyed the privileges of an old and intimate friend, it is true; but at the moment Somers was decidedly annoyed at the half-jesting, half-serious speech of his old chum.

As they came out of the dining-room, after a meal in which from soup to nuts Tarbox had monopolized the conversation, enlivening an otherwise awkward hour, Somers noticed the young man, whose insignia proclaimed him the vessel's wireless operator, talking with the purser in the latter's little cage. The purser

was scrutinizing his passenger list carefully, and shaking his head. "Must be some mistake," Somers overheard him say. "No Miss DeForest on this list. Haven't you got the wrong name?" An idea flashed through Somers' mind, and he glanced quickly at Tarbox, who had stepped aside to fill his cigarette case at the cigar counter, and consequently was out of earshot for the time being. In gathering up the train of the old rose gown, that the girl might climb the staircase, a filmy wisp of handkerchief had dropped from her hand to the floor, and he stooped to recover it.

"Your handkerchief, Miss DeForest," he whispered, pressing the lace square into her hand. She gave him a little, startled, half-frightened look; enough to convince him his suspicion was correct. Tarbox was just turning from the cigar counter; in a minute he would be with them again.

"There's a wireless for Miss DeForest," Somers said, under his breath. "It flashed over me it might be for you. If you wish, I think I can get it for you."

She said nothing for a moment, though her eyes were telegraphing the question, "How?" Just as Tarbox reached them she said, in the barest whisper, "Oh, get it if you can. I must know what it says."

"Just take charge of my wife a minute, will you, Dick?" said Somers instantly. "I've got to see the purser a minute." He approached the official's little window, just as the wireless operator was going away.

Leaning upon the little shelf, he attempted a confidential and yet bashful air; and in truth he did not have to put on a great deal. The purser glanced at him sharply, somewhat adding to his confusion.

"I'm Mr. Chichester," he began hastily. "My wife and I are in 21 and 23, you know. I just happened to think that,—well, that there might be some wireless message for my wife to-night, not under the name of Chichester. Confidentially, you see, we were just married to-day—rather suddenly—and, well, you understand, don't you?"

The purser was a young man, not long enough in his position to have fully acquired the complete disinterestedness that develops in persons who follow his calling after a while. Thus the suggestion of an elopement was sufficient to excite his attention. He looked quizzically at Somers; that young gentleman strove to return the look without coloring too deeply.

"What name would such a message come under, perhaps?" the official inquired. Somers drew a long breath as he took the chance. "DeForest," he answered. "Hildegarde DeForest. That was my wife's name."

"Here, Mike," called the purser. The wireless operator was already half-way up the stairs; he slowly came back to the window. In a few crisp words the purser outlined the situation. "How about it?" he inquired finally.

"Why, I guess 'twould be all right," said the boy, though a bit doubtfully. "We have to be careful to deliver these messages to the right people, sir; but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll deliver it to your wife, and let her sign for it. You see the circumstances are a bit unusual, and I want to be sure I'm all right."

Miss DeForest and Tarbox were chatting cheerfully in the ladies' cabin. Plainly the real estate man was striving to make a favorable impression; naturally enough since he supposed her to be his friend's wife. As Somers approached them, the operator at his heels, he experienced a vague feeling of annoyance; and for no particular reason which he could justify to himself. He beckoned the girl away so abruptly that Tarbox stared.

"Here's your wireless," he said, rather crossly. "The boy says he'll deliver it to you if you'll sign for it." A moment later she had received the envelope, and promptly excused herself, evidently to the disappointment of Tarbox. She went into her room, and closed the door behind her.

"By Jove," broke out Tarbox admiringly. "Chick, you're a lucky devil; how in the world did you do it? But say, why didn't you tell me you were going down to Sanoset?"

Somers started. "Did Mi—my wife tell you we were going to Sanoset?" he exclaimed; then could

have kicked himself for asking the question. His friend looked at him in some amazement.

"What's got into you, anyway, Chick?" he asked. "You've been acting queer ever since I met you this trip. Why certainly she told me you were going down to Sanoset; same as myself. Is there any secret about it?"

"Why, no," drawled Somers, rather lamely. "I was going to tell you, of course; it just slipped my mind. You see I've had some property left me down there; and I'm going down to see about it; that's all."

"You're acting deucedly funny then," said the other. A sudden idea struck him. "Why, if you've had property left you down there, you must have had some dealings with old Skilayton Ray—the lawyer at Sanoset. He's the big king-pin down there, and handles everything in the legal line." With a suddenly formed suspicion, he glanced somewhat angrily at Somers.

"What were you trying to do anyway, pump me—just before supper? You asked who Ray was; just as if you didn't know."

"Don't be a fool," returned Somers, the more hotly because he knew that the usually guileless Tarbox might drive him into a corner with little effort. "I knew there was a lawyer down there named Ray; but why should I connect him with your man? Why, you don't think I care a hang about your property deal, do you—why should I? Buy up all Sanoset if you like;

I'm down here on business of my own—I'll show you Ray's letter to me if you want."

"Now don't get sore, Chick," said Tarbox, apparently convinced he had accused his friend unjustly, by the latter's show of temper. "I'm a little nervous about this matter, and get worked up easily. Of course I don't really think you're interested in my affairs; as you say, why should you be?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Somers, pretending to be mollified. "And I'll admit I've been acting sort of queer. But it sort of knocked me in a heap, having twenty thousand dollars left me, after the hard row I've been hoeing—trying to break into a law practice in Beantown, without even an acquaintance." Somers naturally did not care to admit that he had hardly thought of his legacy until this minute. Other reasons entirely were responsible for the peculiar manner that even Dickie Tarbox had noticed.

"Twenty thousand dollars——" Tarbox whistled. "Well, that will be quite a lift. No wonder you're acting a bit different than usual. Who left you the bundle, if I might ask the question?"

"Why, an old great-uncle, a retired ship captain down there on the coast. I'd never even seen the man. Naturally it came as a complete surprise to me."

"There's only one thing to do," cried Tarbox, grasping Somers by the elbow. "Great occasions must be properly celebrated. I escort thee to the oasis, me

lord. Aw, come on, Chick; the missis won't care; we'll only be gone a minute. I'll split you a bottle of wine, if they carry such stuff in the stock of this bar."

It appeared that they did; and the steward acted as though he had frequent calls for the same. "Domestic or imported?" he inquired, resting big, hairy hands on the plain little bar. "Sure—we've got both. Mumm's, sir; the best ever, in my opinion."

"Then you'll be getting off with me at Rockland, of course," said Tarbox, as the liquid bubbled in their glasses. "We can hire a motor-boat and go over together. It's the quickest way, don't you think?"

"Er, yes," replied Somers, in a daze. He remembered that his tickets read "Bangor." In a hazy way he knew there was such a coast city as Rockland, for he knew that the Government battle-ships had their speed tests on its course, as does every one who reads the Sunday papers. But as to where it was he had no idea; nor apparently did Miss DeForest know it to be the changing point for Sanoset. She had directed him to book clear through.

"We have to get up deucedly early, that's all," complained Tarbox. "We make Rockland about five in the morning, when it's half dark. Then it's a three hours' trip up the coast to Sanoset; the steamer from Rockland only runs there twice a week. So the only way is to go by motor-boat, unless you want to stay over. I don't."

Somers decided he must see Miss DeForest at once, before she retired, and inform her as to the situation. He left Tarbox in the bar, with the half of the bottle before him, and ascended quickly to stateroom 21.

"Come in," said a muffled voice, at his knock. As he entered the girl sat up quickly; apparently she had been lying upon the bed—and, yes, surely—crying. In fact she was trying to dab away the tears with her wisp of handkerchief. Somers stood in the doorway, abashed.

"I only came to tell you about the changes—for Sanoset, you know," he stumbled. "It seems—why, what is the matter, Miss DeForest? No bad news, I hope."

She pointed to a yellow slip on the floor. "Read it, if you wish," she whispered. Somers picked it up. The few printed words stared him in the face:

> You are making great mistake stop before too late. (signed) Mother.

He looked from the slip to the girl; she was sobbing softly once more.

"But I'm not making a mistake," she sobbed. "Mother's the one. But she is making it so hard for me. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

CHAPTER IV

TWENTY THOUSAND DISAPPEARS

A MOTOR boat brought the three into Sanoset harbor, upon a morning so blue and bright that the sun, reflected as it flashed on the green water, was almost blinding. They disembarked on a slippery float, from whence a steep gangway led up to a moss-covered wharf. As Tarbox lightly ran up this gangway, Miss DeForest drew Somers to the deserted end of the float.

"I must go over this matter with you," she said. "In the meantime let Mr. Tarbox see the people about this land. Even if he can buy it for the professor, I don't see what good it will do them—they can only prevent me trespassing upon it. I have the books, though I've no right to them, if the professor should find out the truth—that I'm not really married. Of course you don't understand a thing I'm saying," for Somers was looking at her in amazement. "But I'll explain as well as I can, at the first opportunity. So please tell Mr. Tarbox we'll see him later. I can't prevent him from seeing the people who own the land, but I don't believe Captain Bridger will sell his share anyway;—father always said the Captain would never

sell a thing if he thought anybody really wanted it. Why, what's the matter?"

"Who did you say?" asked Somers in sudden excitement.

"Why, Captain Bridger—Captain Rowland Bridger." Miss DeForest stared at Somers as if she thought he had gone suddenly crazy. For he was laughing—though a queer, strained laugh.

"And you say Captain Bridger owned part of this land, that Dick's client is interested in, as well as yourself?" he finally managed to say.

"Owned it? Why, he owns it now; I'm sure he's never sold his interest in the property."

"Yes, but Captain Bridger died last month. And more, he left all his property to me. He was my great-uncle, though he never saw me or I him; but as I was his only relative he left practically everything to me. Or at least so Skilayton Ray, his executor, writes me. I only received his letter yesterday."

Miss DeForest was a picture of astonishment. For a little space she was even speechless. But the ruddy face of Tarbox, staring down at them over the black timbers of the old wharf, recalled her to herself.

"And to think I appealed to you on the Common yesterday afternoon," she said in a very low voice. "I was in desperate trouble, and asked your help because I liked your face. You looked like a man who would assist a woman in trouble without expect-

ing ——" she broke off in confusion, her face flaming a vivid scarlet. "But something must have governed my selection; you may call it fate if you wish." Then, all at once, her face fell, while the deep eyes grew suddenly sombre. "But I have no right,—to ask your assistance, under these circumstances," she said in an entirely different tone. "Mr. Tarbox, you say, is empowered to offer as much as twenty thousand for the property I speak of. Your share of that would be large probably; much more than the land might ever sell for again. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' and the thing the professor and I are each after is as uncertain as, well, the will-o'-the-wisp. Though it seems that Professor Gibbs is willing to risk a huge sum on the strength of what he knows, without even the aid of the books. Doubtless he expects to get those from me, provided he buys the land. For they'd be of no use to me if I was kept off the point or the island."

Somers made no answer; he was too much in the dark to say anything particularly relevant. But he resolved on one thing, as he went slowly up the gangway, carrying the heavy suit-case. So far as lay in his power he would help this girl, whether it meant financial loss to himself or not. As to just how he could help her, he had no idea, except that if for some reason or other she was interested in anything that he owned in Sanoset, either land or anything else, he

would make sure that no one should buy at any price if the sale was to hurt her interests. When a man is willing to sacrifice large financial gain for a girl he has known less than twenty-four hours and about whom he knows nothing, at that, one might be justified in thinking him pretty hard hit. But Somers, who in his whole life had enjoyed only the most cursory relations with women, did not think himself smitten with the girl, even a little bit. He told himself he would have done the same for any honest individual in trouble of such a nature as hers—and perhaps he would.

Tarbox they saw, when they had ascended to the wharf, in conversation with a very tall man, red-faced, pin-whiskered, and stooped in a bow like the letter C; who wrapped his long legs around the pile on which he sat so tightly that it seemed almost as if he planned to sit upon that particular post forever. The tall man chewed, very methodically indeed, on a dirty piece of broom-straw. He removed this very carefully, each time it came his turn to speak.

"Bear away, right up the street," he was saying, as the two approached. "You'll make the hotel, right on your port beam; you can't miss the place—more spread o' sail aloft than sech a small hull would carry at sea; but I reckon she's weather tight. Old Solon Titus built her arter he come home from the Chiny trade; modeled like one o' them pagodys over there, I cal'late. His son runs her — young Sim Titus. 'Mornin',

marm." He ducked his head slightly in the direction of Miss DeForest, and regarded Somers with a watery eye, but no form of salutation. Evidently he thought it only proper courtesy to salute the lady.

"Thanks, good friend," replied Tarbox, who would have addressed the mayor in the same easy manner, had the village possessed such a dignitary and he been present. Neither would the mayor have been any more angry at the young man's levity than was the fisherman. Nobody ever got very angry with Tarbox, no matter what he said; though sometimes his actions provoked considerable wrath, among strangers and friends alike.

"Can't we get a carriage of some sort?" put in Somers, who was thinking of Miss DeForest's welfare. The crane-necked denizen of the wharves regarded him stonily; there was no slightest gleam of encouragement in the wrinkles of his hard-skinned, leathery face.

"You can," he drawled through his nose and after a minute. "By walkin' over to the livery stable. It's nearer to the Titus House though."

"Then on to the Titus ——" cried Tarbox, waving his hand in airy fashion. "In the hope that if its architecture be Chinese, at least its fare is good American. Take a good look around you, Somers; perhaps some of this property adorning the landscape may be of your patrimony. Even to this rotting wharf that

we now stand upon." A few bare-footed boys with Tom-cod lines had straggled down upon the dock, and now stood with open mouths, awed by the grandiloquence of the facetious Tarbox. Perhaps it was not the bombastic style that interested the bored villager on his uncertain seat, but certainly something in the young man's speech had attracted his attention. He jumped down from the high piling, and shuffled after the three now starting up the street that straggled away behind the line of deserted docks.

"Did I hear him call you Somers?" he demanded abruptly as he came abreast of them, addressing Somers but jerking a horny thumb at Tarbox. Somers, somewhat puzzled, nodded.

"I swan!" exclaimed the other. "I cal'late then you must be ole Cap'n Rowl Bridger's grand-nephy. We heard he left his property to a feller by that name."

Somers stared; he was not accustomed to little places, and could not assign any motive for the old fellow's questioning him. But Tarbox, who in the course of various hunting, fishing, and automobile trips had come into frequent contact with small town dwellers, took in the situation at a glance.

"You're being interviewed," he exclaimed, "same as any celebrity. No, you loony,"—as Somers looked at him; "of course this burgh doesn't support a newspaper. But this gentleman's a reporter just the same—for the crowd at the corner store. They'll spread the

news abroad faster than any newspaper ever could. Here, let me answer him." He pushed himself to the front, before Somers could interfere, and addressed the man.

"Yes, sir, you are correct in your assumption, unquestionably. I am Mr. Somers' private secretary, authorized to speak for him. As you surmise, he inherits all the large property of his late, lamented, er, great-uncle. He has come down to claim his heritage, accompanied as you see by his charming wife ——" The girl gave a choking little gasp; and Somers, realizing that the joke was being carried too far, sprang forward to shut off his loquacious friend; but the mischief was done. Already the superannuated frequenter of the docks was hobbling away as fast as his long old legs could carry him, doubtless to share his news with various old cronies, and among the good gossips of Sanoset.

"There, you've done it now," groaned Somers. His friend slapped him laughingly upon the shoulder.

"Oh, there's no harm done," he replied. "These villagers will talk anyway. What's the matter with giving them an extra morsel to chew upon." Then as he saw the serious expression upon the girl's face he grew contrite immediately; for Tarbox was nothing if not a gentleman—at heart or on the surface. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure, Mrs. Somers, if I've annoyed you unwittingly. Though really I've said nothing that

these people down here don't know; except that nonsense of my being a private secretary, and possibly a slight exaggeration as to the probable size of the property in question." Of course Tarbox did not dream of the possible complications in which his joke might have involved the two. They all three walked up to the Titus House in silence.

It was a narrow fronted structure with so many upper stories and bay-windows that the description of the old man on the wharf seemed justified. Within, a narrow and uncarpeted hall separated a parlor of funereal aspect from a bare office, its principal furniture a rude desk and a coal stove of immense proportions set into a great tray filled with dirty sawdust. Miss DeForest had an opportunity to draw Somers into the little parlor.

"Oh, what shall we do now?" she began. Somers laughed shortly.

"Thanks to Tarbox, I guess we'll have to bluff it through a while longer, now. Everybody in town will know before night that I'm here, with my wife. Why the deuce was it necessary to say we were married in the first place?"

She bit her lip; the man was looking gloomily out of the room's little window, his back toward her, and his broad shoulders blocking most of the light. Even in his worn suit and shabby hat there was something of dignity about this young man. Tarbox, now, was

clad in raiment that bordered on the purple; his hat was the latest block, while his custom-made shoes bore little resemblance to the pair that Somers had purchased in some cheaper retail store. But as between the two no one would have doubted that Somers was the more forceful in character; even the shrewd old sailor had accepted without question the statement that Tarbox, the glittering, was the secretary. And these old dwellers by the shore who in their day have sailed the seven seas are not very gullible, when it comes to estimates of character at least.

"I'm sorry," she ventured at last. There was a little quavering note in the clear young voice that caught her companion's attention and aroused his sympathy in a second. He whirled around; Miss DeForest was looking down at the floor, and tracing the worn patterns of a once ornate carpet with the toe of a very small shoe.

"What a cad I am," he shot out hoarsely. "To be taking you to task like this. Of course you had a good reason for everything you've done; I'm sure of that. And though naturally I'm considerably puzzled I can wait until you make things clear—hang it, anyway."

The last three words were repeated under his breath. For a board had creaked in the passageway, and simultaneously the shining face of Tarbox peeped around the moulding of the doorway.

"Oh, there you are. Well, I've succeeded in rousing the clerk. He's looking for the pen now, so that we can register."

Leaving the girl to stand guard over the suit-case, Somers followed his friend across the hall to the office. A thin-haired fellow with eye-glasses, and a yellowish moustache that struggled to conceal a weak-lined mouth, was scraping in the clutter of a drawer. As they entered he glanced up with triumphant smile, and dragged to light a pen, its point considerably rusted with hard-dried ink, but still an instrument for writing, could one's nerves endure its scratching and scraping. He whirled a dusty leaved register toward them, laid down the pen beside a weak-hued ink-bottle, then placed shiny elbows comfortably on the counter and hunched himself, chin in hands, to watch whatever operations took place.

Tarbox was looking at his watch. Then he advanced to the desk. "You'll pardon me, old chap," he said over his shoulder to Somers, "but I'd like to register first. I want to run over and see old Ray before dinner-time. Likely he's got into touch with my man by now. I'll tell him you're here, if you want."

"No," exclaimed Somers, hastily. "Better not. You see, well, there's no particular hurry over my business, and no use to bother Mr. Ray until I see him myself. We'll wait for you here." Secretly he

was considerably relieved; for he had wondered how to rid himself for a time from the somewhat ubiquitous Tarbox, without hurting the feelings of that happy-go-lucky fellow. Tarbox shortly departed, flinging his traveling case carelessly into a corner, but Somers noticed that the black portfolio his friend had carried all day now went with him. Doubtless it contained the twenty thousand dollars, for the safety of which the exuberant chap was responsible. He was just stooping over the register himself when his chum's voice boomed in through the half-open window.

"Say, Chick, look after my bag until I get back, will you? I haven't got a room yet."

Somers, with guilty feeling still, scrawled on the fly-specked page beneath his friend's breezy signature the names, "C. Somers and wife," and inquired for two rooms with baths. The clerk hesitated before replying.

"Only got one room with bath," he finally remarked. "It's a nice, large, double room, though. Won't that do?"

Obviously it would not, and Somers shook his head emphatically. "My wife can take it," he said. "Put me up most anywhere;"—he bethought himself,—"as near to her room as you can, of course." The clerk seemed a little surprised; and noting his expression Somers stumbled on with an excuse.

"You see my wife's very nervous—must be by herself—and can't stand any noise."

"She won't be troubled much here, then," said the clerk dryly. Plainly the insipid looking fellow was something of a humorist. "Want to go up now?" he concluded.

"Up?" Somers stared blankly. "Oh, ah, yes; of course. I'll speak to my wife." He stepped across the hall to where the girl awaited him. As he came out, carrying the heavy suit-case, he bethought himself of his chum's request, and stepped into the office after the latter's bag, relinquishing the suit-case to the waiting clerk—who was evidently porter and bell-boy as well. The clerk's jaw sagged as he lifted the case.

"Gosh," he remarked to Somers, ingenuously, "you must have this thing full of books, or bricks. Both of 'em weigh down awfully, don't they?"

As they entered a sunny apartment, the room Miss DeForest was to occupy, she laid one hand, rather timidly, upon Somers' arm. "Won't you stay a few minutes," she whispered, "that we may talk over this matter? We don't seem to have much opportunity, when Mr. Tarbox is around." A trace of a smile illumined her face.

As the clerk passed out she unstrapped the heavy suit-case. Upon the top were various articles that a woman would naturally travel with—dresses, brushes, and the like. She tumbled them out, helter-skelter

upon the floor, until she came to several musty volumes in faded, and rather tattered covers; they looked very much like old law-books, which have been thumbed and worn by several generations of arduous students. The last thing one might expect to find in the traveling bag of a fashionable young lady; and Somers, racking his brain while she dumped them out on the rag carpet, could not conceive what possible use she had for them. Evidently the young woman was considerably excited, and in her nervousness she could not work with rapidity. He helped her place the volumes, there were half a dozen of them, on the table in the center of the room. As he did so one of the old books dropped open—it appeared to be some deep work relating to the sciences, such as ancient scholars loved to write, and students of a bygone day to pore over. The type was old-fashioned, the printing poor, and the leaves yellowed by time. Somers was more mystified than ever.

The girl's face was flushed with excitement as she opened one of the books, turning to its fly-leaf. But just as she was about to speak there was another interruption. Hurrying footsteps resounded on the wooden stairs. Some one came tearing along the hallway. The door flew open, with scarce the formality of a knock. It was Tarbox, flustered, hot, and breathless. He had been running, and was almost winded. Without a word of explanation he rushed to the grip

that was standing in a corner; his bag which he had left in Somers' charge. It was locked, but he opened it with a key from his ring, and thrust both arms within. Shirts, collars, neckties, and a shaving-case came tumbling out. Finally he pulled forth a flat-backed leather affair that held two silver-backed hair-brushes and combs and other articles of toilet. He reached inside this case, fumbled in the interior for a moment, then dropped it to the floor while a look of consternation came over his already worried countenance.

"It's gone!" he gasped.

"What's gone?" exclaimed both the girl and Somers, in the same breath.

"Why, the money. 'Twas in a sealed envelope, and for safety I stuck it into this case, where no one would think of looking for it. Then I forgot about it, and thought it was in the portfolio with my papers. I just remembered, on the way to the lawyer's office." He dropped limply into a chair; his face had lost every vestige of its normal color.

"But think, man; just think," exclaimed Somers, going over and shaking his scatter-brained friend by the shoulder. "Nobody could have got into the bag; —it was locked, and has hardly been out of your sight a moment. And I'm sure nobody touched it after you left it in my charge."

"I can't help that," groaned Tarbox. He was rock-

ing back and forth in his chair, like a man demented, great beads of perspiration standing out upon his forehead. "I remember now; and I'm sure—positive. I put the money into that toilet-case; a fool idea to keep it safe. And now it's gone; it's gone. And I'm responsible. What shall I do? They'll never trust me with anything again."

CHAPTER V.

MISS DEFOREST EXPLAINS

MR. SKILAYTON RAY was not the thin, stoop-shouldered man in rusty black that seems to be the type of country lawyer as personified in the minds of many very good and much misguided people. If landlords are proverbially rotund and jolly, one glancing at fat, little Mr. Ray might have thought him the proprietor of the most convivial and best-paying hostelry on earth. He had the round and chubby face of a baby; all full of little, humorous wrinkles; and withal as inscrutable as is the countenance of the infant not yet released from its cradle. Sunny eyes twinkled at his many clients through gold-bowed spectacles which slipped uncertainly up and down the bridge of his decidedly pug nose. He usually dressed in well-cut but wrinkled clothes of some grayish color, into the creases of which fell everything from cracker crumbs to stray grains of tobacco. Skilayton Ray never brushed his suits, neither did he ever allow his housekeeper—he was a bachelor—to touch them.

He was sitting this morning in the room of his of-

fice whose door was marked, "Private," but which was usually as public, you might say, as Billy Green's grocery-store; though the loungers in the Squire's office were distinctly of a higher caste than the frequenters of Green's big, cool store. This morning, however, the lawyer was alone. Outside, in his main office, clicked the keys of a typewriter, pounded by the pretty fingers of Millie Colleen, who was the Squire's ward as well as his stenographer. The village people had always woven a mystery about Miss Colleen; from the time when, as a tiny baby, some twenty years before, Squire Ray had brought her back from one of his infrequent trips, "up-country," on business of which no one in the village had knowledge. The lawyer sat comfortably, his feet upon a littered table, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, and his Panama hat pushed well back upon his forehead. He was reading the latest issue of the Crawtown *Banner*, which was the county paper.

Into the private office, through a door which opened directly into the hallway, came a tiny man in black, dusty clothes, and carrying a battered medicine case; which proclaimed him what he was, the village doctor, Taberton Brack, M. D. Everybody in town, however, knew him as "Tabby" Brack, and addressed him familiarly as "Doc." He put his case upon the table, and drew up a chair close to the desk of the lawyer.

"'Morning, 'Layton," he greeted him. "Thought

I'd drop in a minute, going by. Well, your legatee is in town, young Somers. I just heard it down at the drug-store."

"Sho," said the Squire. "You don't say. He must 'a' come over from Rockland, by motor-boat then, this morning."

"Yes, he did. He's over at the Titus House now. His wife's with him."

"What?" said the Squire, sitting up. "His wife? Well, I'm horn-swizzled. Why, he ain't out o' college more'n two or three years. These young fellows get married, nowadays, before they've fairly shed their swaddling clothes."

The doctor nodded. Like his friend, the lawyer, he was unmarried; though a good fifty-five years had rolled over his head. A slow grin now stole over his face.

"Well, if he's only that long out o' college he must have progressed pretty fast," he continued. "Unless he had money anyway. For he's got his private secretary along with him, too."

The lawyer's face was a study. It was fully a minute before he exploded. "Private be damned!" he ejaculated. Then, hearing a smothered cough in the outside office, he shoved the door shut with one big foot. "Millie's death on swearing," he explained; "especially since she took that Sunday school class. I have to watch myself every blessed minute when

she's around. But private secretary; nonsense. Why, this feller's a young lawyer in Boston;—no money at all except what he earns, I believe. Young Boston lawyers don't need private secretaries any more'n a freight-brakeman needs a handkerchief; they're lucky to pay their office-rent."

"Can't help it," replied the other. "He's got one just the same. He told old Skillet Copp so—that is the secretary did—down on the landing-wharf."

Gradually the puzzled look died out of Ray's face. He grinned at the doctor shrewdly.

"I expect somebody's been joshing Skillet," he said. "Likely enough young Somers may have some friend down with him; and perhaps they're trying to get a rise out of the rubes. That's what some folks from the city consider us down here, Doc, even in these enlightened days. Probably Copp was asking questions that these folks thought none of his business; 'twould be just like him."

"Well, p'r'aps you're right," said the doctor. "But I guess the wife was no josh. They say she's as pretty as a picture."

"I'm glad the boy picked a good-looking one," said the lawyer. "Married life must be awful for some men, tied up with the critters that they pick out."

The doctor grinned. "We never had the nerve to try to get even a homely one," he remarked. "Well, I must be running along; got a call to make before din-

ner. Say, 'Layton, is there any truth in this rumor I hear—that somebody wants to buy the Owl's Point property, and Little Clam Island? I've heard it quite frequently upon the street."

"Ain't this a town now?" said the lawyer, laughing a little. "You can't keep anything quiet around here. I'm sure I've never mentioned it. But between you and me, there is an offer for the property; from Boston parties. A real estate firm down there, acting for some one who wants the land for a summer place, I presume."

"I suppose you'll sell, won't you? The land ain't worth much, except for some one like that."

"Well, I dunno," said Ray, leaning back in his chair, and crossing his legs. "You see, that's heirship property. I've got a power of attorney to act for all the heirs—they're scattered all over the continent—except one; that's this young Somers you've been speaking of. Old Cap'n Bridger owned a one-half undivided interest in that property, which goes to Somers, of course. And for some reason the old Cap'n would never sell his share; I've had two or three chances to dispose of the property, but he always blocked the deal. The other heirs have wanted to sell for years; why, the property ain't worth the taxes on it. Pasture a few sheep on the island, and dig a few clams on the point—that's all it's good for. Except of course to some city chap, who wants to build a country home.

There's a nice, sightly view; and it's kind o' pretty out there."

"The old Cap'n was queer in some ways, wasn't he?" said the doctor. "But a fine, sterling old fellow; I hope his nephew's some like him. Well, I must be going."

"Just a minute, Doc," said the other, assuming a somewhat mysterious air. "I'd just as soon tell you a few things, for I know it won't go any further. Just look at this now; a telegram from Boston; telephoned over from Crawtown this morning. Millie took it down herself." He extended to his friend a paper, upon which a few words were written in the firm, clear handwriting of a girl. Sanoset had no telegraph office; and telegrams had to be telephoned in from the nearest Western Union office, which was at Crawtown, nine miles away.

Brack squinted at the paper, through near-sighted eyes. The message was addressed to "Skilayton Ray, Sanoset, Maine," and read as follows:

Do not deal Tarbox await my arrival.

GIBBS.

"What is it?" asked the doctor, uncomprehendingly.

"Blessed if I know. Tarbox is the fellow from the real estate firm that's been corresponding with me about this land, I suppose. Though I didn't know they

were sending a man down here until I got this. I wrote 'em I couldn't do anything on that land just now; perhaps they thought they'd do better if they came on. But this Gibbs here; I never heard of him. Maybe he's the fellow this firm of Tarbox & Tarbox is acting for."

"Very likely," said Brack. "Perhaps he's changed his mind about wanting to buy. Maybe he's heard that our summer colony pretends to be sort of exclusive, and is afraid he can't meet its requirements." Both men laughed a little. The idiosyncrasies and pretensions of some of the summer people who frequented Sanoset in the season were a sort of standing joke to the better class of village people. Many of the natives could trace their ancestry to days before the Revolution, and were disposed to regard with levity anything that treated, in the slightest, of snobbery, on the part of their summer visitors.

"Well, all I can do is await developments," said the lawyer, looking at his big, silver-cased watch. "Great Cæsar's ghost, it's after eleven o'clock. And me with a dozen letters to get off on the mail. See you later, Brack; I've got to dig in for a few minutes now."

At about that same moment, in the room at the Titus House, Somers and Tarbox were going carefully through the latter's grip-sack, while Hildegarde De-Forest looked anxiously on. Shirts, collars, neckties, socks, and handkerchiefs were strewn all over the

floor. But there was no sign of the missing envelope; neither was it in the portfolio, though they went through the papers in that receptacle again, to make sure. Tarbox had gotten a grip on himself, now the first shock of his loss was over; though his face was still white and his eyes haggard. There was a grim line about his mouth and jaw, though, that Somers did not remember ever having noticed before.

"No use to hunt, Somers," he said, as Chick started a third time to go through the contents of the traveling bag. "It's gone—that's all, though I can't possibly account for it. The bag hasn't been out of my sight a moment; though I did forget for a while and thought the envelope was in my portfolio. But I'm sure now that I put the money in the toilet-case, and that's the whole of it. Well, thank heavens, the governor won't have to stand the loss. I've got a little money that mother left me; though this will wipe it about all out. But, of course, I've got to make good, and take my medicine. Though it's a pretty expensive illustration of the folly of carelessness."

"Now, let's see," said Somers. "Coming over in the power boat you had this bag right on the seat by your side. Then you carried it up here to the hotel. When Mi—er, Hildegarde and I came in the parlor you went into the office, carrying the bag still. I don't know what you did in there. But I do remember that when you came after me, and I followed you into the

office, you didn't have the bag with you, though the portfolio was under your arm. So there's one time it was out of your sight."

"Yes, but only for a minute. I dropped it beside the desk while I was ringing for the clerk. He came in from a door behind the desk. Then I went after you—only gone a minute. When I came back the bag was in the same place I had left it, and he wouldn't have had time to get around the end of that desk and back again if he was three times as spry as he seems to be. Let alone that the bag was locked all the time. There was no one else around. Nothing in that, you see."

"And I left the bag, too, for a minute," confessed Somers. "Of course I didn't dream the money was in it. But I only stepped across the hall to call Gardy. Come to think of it, the clerk came out of the office with me. Then I went back after your bag; I wasn't out of the office more than a minute surely. But still, there's another time it was out of sight."

"It's no use," answered Tarbox in a weary voice. "The money's gone—you can say it has been stolen or anything you want to. It must have been done, of course, in one of those two times when the bag was out of sight; less than a minute, almost, each time. If that sleepy-eyed clerk or anybody else was clever enough in that length of time to open a locked bag, find money in the back of a toilet-case—the last place most

any one would expect to find it—close the bag and lock it again, and get away with it, why, then, he's a specimen of crook that no man of my brain power can ever prove guilty; or the best detective in the country either, I'll wager."

"You forget, Mr. Tarbox," put in Miss DeForest, quietly, "or perhaps you don't forget either, that, er, my husband and I were alone with your bag for considerably more than a minute."

Tarbox tried to smile, though it was a forlorn attempt. "I hoped you wouldn't mention that," he said simply. "I've known Chick Somers since we were in prep school. We were together four years in college. He's my friend. I wouldn't believe him guilty of such a thing if I'd caught him with his hand in the bag. And it goes without saying that all that applies to his wife as well." He was looking toward the window and did not see Somers wince at his last sentence. The girl's eyes were very moist, though she said nothing; nor did Somers. But the latter crossed the room and put one strong hand on his old chum's shoulder.

A minute later Tarbox got on his feet. Very slowly he gathered up his belongings and restored them to his grip. Then he turned to the two who watched him silently.

"I think I'll get a room now," he said. "I want to be by myself a bit. I don't believe I can eat any dinner. If you go up to see Ray, don't say you saw me,

please. He doesn't know I'm coming anyway, unless the pater wired him or he got some word from my client, Gibbs. After I've pulled myself together a bit I shall telegraph my broker to turn over my securities. Thank God they're in my own name—I don't want the pater to know about this; at least for a while." He tried to smile once more. "If you don't see me this afternoon, don't be worried," he went on. "I want to get adjusted to this thing if I can. It's—it's—well, it's sort of stabbed me in the back." He went out slowly, without further words.

"I thought your friend rattle-brained," said Miss DeForest admiringly. "I guess he is. But he's wonderfully plucky—he stood up to that like a man."

"He's the best fellow in the world," exclaimed Somers. "By George, too, we've got to find out where that money went to. Dick seems sure enough that he put it in his toilet-case, and certainly it's not in the bag now."

"I can't understand it," she returned. "It surely seems incredible that anybody could have taken it in either of the only two times it was possible. But—well, I suppose stranger things have happened. Some criminals are very clever. But surely Sanoset harbors no thieves of the ability to do a thing like this."

Her companion helplessly shrugged his shoulders. His eyes, roving restlessly over the room, fell upon one of the open books upon the table. It brought back

the fact to his mind that the girl had been going to tell him something that would account for her mysterious actions just as Tarbox had interrupted them in quest of the money in the envelope. She caught his look, and took up the book again.

"I may as well begin now as ever," she said. "We can do nothing just now, can we, to help your friend? Or perhaps you don't feel like listening just now."

"Now as well as ever," he repeated, perhaps just a little ungraciously. Tarbox's tragic face was still before his eyes.

"Then you must know first that these books came into the possession of my father, some years ago, before his disappearance. You must have seen the details of that in the papers at the time. No? Well, it was ten years ago, and one forgets in ten years. Of course, it was impressed very vividly on my mind, though I was only a little girl at the time. Professor Haven DeForest, the geologist. He was always poking about over all portions of the continent in his researches. He was first of all the scientist, but practical enough to so turn his abilities that great corporations paid him well for his services. That is how he left mother and me well provided for; at least, comfortably well. He went west to carry on some investigations for a mining company; called upon by their engineers, I believe, for some reason or other; it doesn't matter what now, for he never got to their

mine. We lost all trace of him in Denver. He simply dropped out without one smallest clue. Sometimes you read of such things and regard them as impossible —unreal. This was real enough to me, surely, and to poor mother. Well . . .

"Mother knew a little bit about books from what father had told her. Of course, I was a little girl at the time; she told me afterwards, long afterwards. You see, he came down into Maine on one of his trips and fell in with ——"

Rap. Rap. Rap. Some one, who had approached softly, was thundering on the door.

"What is it?" shouted Somers.

The soft voice of the clerk answered. "Gentleman in the parlor to see Mr. Somers."

CHAPTER VI

THE TREASURE SHIP OF LOUIS-PHILIPPE

THE red-headed editor of the county paper, the Crawton *Banner,* sat in his office, feet upon a chair, green eye-shade pulled well over his spectacles, smoking a pipe of most evident strength, and blue-penciling a heap of typed sheets that a smutty-faced boy had just brought to his already crowded desk. The *Banner* was to the county that which the *Tribune* once was to New York, or that which the *Transcript* still is to a certain section of Boston. It was well named, for it flaunted and flapped in the van of every movement, for reform or betterment of economic and social conditions, that even so much as stirred in the whole section —both coast and inland—for many, many miles. Another thing made the *Banner* unique among country newspapers; for it was a strictly non-partisan sheet. And its editor and owner, familiarly known throughout the district as Joey Hunkus, was an absolutely fearless man;—a characteristic which his flaming red hair may or may not have had anything to do with.

His work was interrupted by the entrance of the office boy, who shuffled to his employer's side through

a veritable sea of papers upon the unswept floor and laid down a card upon the pile of proof sheets. Hunkus glanced at it carelessly and grunted, without removing the cob pipe from his lips, "All right, Tim; slide the gentleman in."

"He ain't alone," answered Tim. "They's a lady with him. An' say, boss, she certainly is a peach."

"A lady," said Hunkus, in surprise and some dismay. It was not often that members of the fairer sex graced his little office with their presence, except for the two middle-aged, rather severe females upon the *Banner* force. The editor glanced hastily about his little room, as if for a moment he contemplated clearing it up somewhat before he received his visitors. But plainly such a task was impossible, almost. Hunkus sighed and put away his evil-smelling pipe.

"Well, son, show 'em both in," he directed.

After the boy had departed on his errand the editor wiped the dust from two rickety chairs with his pocket handkerchief and kicked some of the papers upon the floor out of sight beneath his desk. Presently there was a knock, and Tim slouched in, escorting a young lady and a pleasant-faced young man with a cigarette. Hunkus came to his feet and stood beaming upon the pair, his red hair ruffled all over his bullet head.

"Mr. Hunkus, I presume," said the young man. "I am Mr. Somers,"—he indicated the card that lay upon the pile of manuscript. "My wife, Mr. Hun-

kus;"—the editor bowed so low that he did not notice the flush which passed swiftly over the young woman's face at the introduction.

"Won't you be seated?" he asked; then sank down into his own chair and looked at his visitors inquiringly.

"I have a letter for you from Mr. Ray, Mr. Skilayton Ray, over in Sanoset," said Somers, stretching forth an envelope.

Hunkus took out the sheet within, upon which a few lines were written in Ray's almost indecipherable scrawl.

"Dear Joe," ran the letter. "This will serve to introduce Chichester Somers and wife, of Boston. He has inherited the property of our old friend, Captain Rowl Bridger—who was his great-uncle. Somers has some questions to ask—something about old county history, and which relates in some way to old manuscripts or books. I told him you were the historian of our section and the only real bibliophile in the county; so perhaps you can tell him what he wants to know. Why don't you give us a good Republican editorial in that misguided sheet of yours,—something about a protective tariff, say—and let up a bit on your free trade views and other damned socialistic theories? And drop over to Sanoset some day on a fishing trip with me;—I know a trout-brook that's aching fairly to be fished by a couple of real fishermen; and I'll supply the bait—all kinds.

"Hastily your friend,
"SKILAYTON RAY."

"Great old fellow—Ray," said Hunkus, after he had glanced through the scrawl. "One of my best friends, and as fine a chap as you could meet. Well, Mr. Somers, any information I possess is at your service, surely."

"Thank you," said Somers. "Mr. Ray said you knew all the old traditions and the ancient history of this section of coast. And I am going to ask if you can tell us anything of an old captain who sailed from this coast years ago,—Gideon Badd, by name. From what we can pick up, he certainly lived up to that name."

The editor laughed. "Old Gid Badd," he exclaimed. "I can tell you a good deal about the old character—though how authentic the tales about him may be I do not know. Why, his very name inspired terror, even in my boyhood days—when old Badd had been dead for thirty years at the least. He is said to have been a pirate—the last of the pirates, in fact;—and as terrible in his way as Kidd, or Blackbeard, or any of the old buccaneers, who terrorized the seas before Badd's time. The day of pirates was thought to be long over when Badd flourished, in the thirties and forties, consequently this old chap did not become as notorious as the buccaneers of an older day; but the wise ones whispered that many a ship or schooner thought lost in storm at sea might be accounted for by Gideon Badd. On the surface, though, he was a bluff

Yankee skipper, trading in West Indies rum and molasses; there was a fortune in that in the old days. He never picked a crew from these parts, but always carried a crowd of hard-looking fellows that he picked up along the coast and in the islands. My father remembered the old fellow after he retired from the sea and built his mansion on an island over in Sanoset. The house afterwards burned and, as old Badd was never seen afterwards, it was supposed that he perished in the flames. The country people thought it was a judgment upon him."

"You really think he was a pirate, though, do you?" asked Somers. Hunkus looked somewhat surprised at his visitor's eager tone.

"My opinion would be worth little," he answered. "I can only tell you the traditions as they have been handed down. Badd died a lifetime before I was born, you know. But there is one story about him (I used to hear it as a boy from the old sailors), that if there is any truth in it, certainly makes him a pirate, and no small fry, either. It was a story of the Louis-Philippe treasure ship."

"Never heard of it," commented Somers briefly.

"No, and so far as I know, there is no written account of any such ship to be found anywhere. But the story was current years ago; I have heard it from several old men as a boy, with only slight variations in the telling. I will relate it, if you like, as I remember it.

"Louis-Philippe, afterwards King of France, was in exile for a period of twenty-one years, and a part of that time he spent in the United States. In 1814 he returned to Paris and, except for a brief exile at the time of the 'Hundred Days,' in the following year, he lived in France most of the time during the reign of Louis XVIII and that of Charles X; in 1830, as you probably know, he became king himself, reigning until the Revolution of 1848. But during the years after his return, and until he ascended the throne, Louis-Philippe was regarded with considerable jealousy because of his rather liberal opinions. Some of these he no doubt imbibed in this country when he was an exile here.

"That is enough for the history—now for the story. According to the tale, at some time probably in the twenties. Louis-Philippe feared that the jealousies might culminate in a plot against him,—therefore he made up his mind that if he had to leave France again he would not go unprovided for. He sent a ship to America, with a cargo consigned to friends in New York, and this ship, according to the story, carried a very valuable treasure. He was Duke of Chartres and of Orleans, and a very rich man in his own right, not to speak of the money of his wife, who was a daughter of the King of Naples. And a certain Captain Cremonde, the friend as well as the servant of Louis, sailed on this ship for America, and is said to

have been in charge of the treasure. Well, the vessel never made port, and it was said she was sunk by Gideon Badd, after he had removed the treasure, of course. He made a clean job of it; none of the crew lived to tell the story, but some of Badd's men blabbed in their cups. If Badd really did it, it must have been the biggest haul he ever made. Fifty thousand louis-d'or was the amount of that treasure; let's see, that would be about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars of our money; a quarter of a million. All in gold and precious stones. Louis-Philippe must have had a sad day when he found that his ship had been lost. But he became king himself afterwards, so doubtless he made it up with interest. They mostly did in those days."

Somers looked significantly at the young woman. The editor—his sharp, blue eyes missed little—noted the look, and his surmise became a surety. The eyes behind the bent rimmed spectacles twinkled a little, but the wise old mouth remained close shut. If these young people wished to conceal their secret he would certainly, by no slightest word or act, have them think he had suspicion of it. But—treasure hunting; in these days; Hunkus wanted to laugh but was too polite. Years of holding the helm of a country newspaper, with the political experience that goes hand in hand with such editorial duties, had made him a practical, prosaic man; the spark of romance that exists some-

where in every soul must be pretty well extinguished in his case, he mused. However, he awoke from his little fit of abstraction—for young Somers was speaking again.

"Your tale of the Louis-Philippe treasure is most interesting. And I am glad to find that Gideon Badd was a real, flesh-and-blood personage, not merely a mythical hero of countryside stories. But, Mr. Hunkus, let us come down to the real meat of our inquiry. Skilayton Ray has informed us that you are a true bibliophile, a lover of old editions, and a student of old books and manuscripts. So possibly you can tell us of the Quarnoton Works; 'Ten Volumes Relating to the Arts and the Sciences; by Richard Quarnoton, Esquire,' is the full inscription of their title-page, I believe."

Hunkus leaned back in his chair, a vivid, splendid smile breaking over his homely face. Plainly the editor was in his proper element now, the hobby of old books and forgotten, ancient manuscripts, that the true lover of such things finds an absorbing subject.

"Yes, indeed. Quarnoton's Scientific Works. It has been my good fortune to see several copies, but never a complete set. There were only twenty-five sets originally, back in 1801, when the thing was published. Quarnoton would have been a pioneer had he possessed more education—for the man must have had a splendid mind naturally. He was ahead of many of

the scientists of his day at that, and he a sea captain who could scarcely read and write at the start, and taught himself navigation as a boy before the mast. Perhaps he did not possess the true type of scientific mind, for he was practical enough to make money at sea—lots of it for his day. By the way, he was a product of old Sanoset, too, same as Gideon Badd, but they were very different men. I had occasion to look up about Quarnoton, for I read a paper on the old chap at the County Historical Association two years ago."

"Yes, but about his books?" put in Somers anxiously.

"Well, he wrote them after he retired from the sea. A tremendous task; ten of those quaintly worded old volumes. The man must have done a simply tremendous amount of reading and thinking, you see, even if his conclusions and deductions are often erroneous. After he had finished them—he was an old man then—he could not find a publisher, so he had the books printed at his own expense. Only twenty-five sets, though;—printing cost money in those days. I don't suppose there is a complete set in existence now; if so, it would be worth a fortune to a collector. There are a few copies scattered about in this county; or were, years ago; I haven't seen one of the books for years."

There was a tense, strained note in Somers' voice

as he leaned forward in his chair regarding the editor anxiously.

"And you probably know of a man who used to live in this county; he disappeared, I think, some twenty years ago—an old man of Irish descent, Patrick McLaughlin."

At the name Hunkus straightened up in his chair, eyes blazing hotly.

"Did I know Pat McLaughlin? I should say that I did. Poor Pat McLaughlin. The victim of the dirtiest conspiracy ever pulled off in this state. It was when the old Crawtown Bank failed; I was newly come to this town then. Old Pat was president; a simple, kindly old man, who could hardly write his own name, but had cleared up a fortune in timber lands; an honest fortune, too, which is more than can be said for some of the fortunes made in that game. Some of these smart Yankees were jealous of McLaughlin, and they made a scapegoat of him. He never wrecked the bank; it was that cold-blooded gang using him for their tool. But it ruined him. He had to flee in the night—not so much to escape the law, but that the people would have tarred and feathered him; maybe worse—feeling ran pretty high. The poor, foolish people, who always believe what the smooth ones tell 'em, and follow the leader like brainless sheep. If they'd have only stopped to reason, they must have known that it wasn't in Pat McLaughlin to do a thing

like that—and wreck the hopes of widows and orphans. They're people living right around here to-day, and holding their heads mighty high, too, that are responsible for the thing Pat McLaughlin was blamed for, if it could only be proven. But, do you know, why this was twenty years ago, but if I should write an editorial to-day saying that maybe Pat McLaughlin wasn't as guilty as had been thought, there are lots of good, well-meaning people who would come in here and stop their papers, or take away their advertising. Talk about the power of the press—in a matter like that—bah." He broke off, and looked at the two rather shamefacedly. "I guess I'm getting excited. It's the Irish in me—my mother was Irish, God rest her soul. And my father was a Polander—a Polock they called me, sneeringly, when I first came around here. I knew things these hide-bound people had never heard of; but I was on the level, in their eyes, with some poor devil of a countryman of mine who slaves in the logging camps. Of course, I'm an American really—I was born in New York. But the Polish blood in me makes me feel for the under dog; and the Irish makes me want to fight for him. That's why I sympathize so, I guess, with old Pat McLaughlin. But, say, you'll excuse my little outburst;—you had something to ask about him, did you not?" He glanced at Somers inquiringly.

"Mr. Hunkus, of course this talk is confidential.

And if there are some things you don't understand, we'll try and explain them later on. But Mr. McLaughlin had in his possession Volumes Six and Seven of Quarnoton's Work, as we know. And it is most important to us that we get hold of those two volumes, if possible. They were left in his charge when he was in the bank here, and only a short time before his trouble and disappearance. And they are of such importance to us that we will give one thousand dollars for the two; five hundred for each volume."

Hunkus looked surprised at the amount named. He fingered the stem of his cob pipe uneasily as if his fingers itched to raise it to his mouth.

"I judge, then, you have more than a mere collector's interest," he hazarded. "As I say, the books would be valuable to a bibliophile, but not worth any such sum as you have named. It is the identical volumes left with McLaughlin that you desire;—not any copies of Volumes Six or Seven that might be obtainable?"

Somers nodded.

"Well, it is quite a contract. McLaughlin left in a hurry—no time to pack, or take things with him. He has never returned. His poor wife (the shock broke her heart, I think) gathered together what little she could, and went up to Boston with their little girl; she died up there, I guess. Nobody knows where McLaughlin went to; the detectives never found him.

They took his house and what personal property he left, of course, to make the bank whole as far as possible. Also what timber holdings were left. But his money was gone, as well as the bank's. Though I'll never believe McLaughlin carried it away. The same ones who wrecked the bank got his money, too, I'll always believe."

"What became of the daughter?" asked Mrs. Somers,—the first time she had spoken during the interview.

"Nobody knows. Very likely she went into some orphanage, poor little chick. She was only a baby at the time."

"But it's unlikely McLaughlin took the volumes with him," said Somers. "They'd have been of no value to him; he was simply holding them for another, anyway. Don't you suppose an advertisement, stating such a sum as I name would be paid for the recovery of these volumes, would bring some results? Very likely they're knocking around somewhere in this section."

"More likely they've been burned," replied Hunkus, "or thrown out on some rubbish heap to decay. Your average citizen doesn't see much of value in musty old books. Of course, such an advertisement would do no harm. Not that I wish to discourage you," he continued, as Somers' face fell. "Neither do I want to be too sanguine. But, in any case, don't state that

you'll pay a thousand dollars for these volumes. Whoever had them, if they are in existence, would be sure to hold you up then. I know my neighbors too well. Just simply state they are desired, and that a fair price will be paid for them. And I suppose you don't want to appear in it either."

"Oh, no," said Somers hastily. "Let the business be done through this office."

"Very well. I'll run an ad in this week's edition—that comes out to-morrow. The *Banner* covers this country mighty thoroughly,—if you'll forgive an old editor for bragging a little. But don't be disappointed if you don't get results; it will surprise me, in fact, if you get hold of these identical volumes."

"At least we'll have made the attempt," exclaimed Somers, rising. "Mr. Ray asked us to urge you to come over to Sanoset and see him. Let us add our invitation to his. We shall be there for some time settling things up."

He gave the editor a cordial hand-clasp and the lady smiled. The next moment the sagging door had slammed behind them. The editor looked thoughtfully at it, as if he could see them descending the dusty stairs through the cheap piece of yellow pine; meanwhile he picked up his pipe and automatically scratched a match.

"Gideon Badd's buried treasure," he mused. "The gold of Louis-Philippe, and all that. Maybe the old

stories are true, but I'm skeptical; yes, I'm skeptical. But I don't understand about these books—unless they contain some cipher or other. By Jove, this thing may prove interesting. I think I'll accept those kind invitations and drop over to Sanoset some day."

Then, like a wise man, before he forgot, he scribbled the ad and handed it to Tim, that it be carried to the printer. The clock said noon, and it was a muggy, moist day. There was a fat, brown bottle in the little closet, and Hunkus liked an appetizer before dinner. Even as Tim went out the door with his slip he could hear a familiar gurgling behind the closet's concealing door.

CHAPTER VII

CARTON MAKES A PROPOSITION

THE Honorable Smithfield Carton sat in his o which was situated in a little ell jutting out from side of his house on Elmwood Avenue, Crawto principal residential street. State Senator Cart he was a member of the upper house in the State islature—sat in front of his little desk in deep frowning thought. Presently he clicked the rec of his telephone and put in a call for 16 RIN(The girl in the little central office, down-town, k that 16 RING-M was the number of the instrume the house of Deacon Samuel Crothers, and bein alert creature, well up in the gossip of the city, knew also that Deacon Crothers had been the cand of the opposition party in the recent political paign, and that he had been very much disgru when Carton had beaten him out. And, though tion was some months past—the previous fall, in —it was common gossip that the old feeling still kled. Consequently, she was surprised that C should put in a call for his arch enemy in town county affairs. But the duties of a telephone gir

purely ministerial, so, in less time than it would take to describe the necessary movements, she had slipped in the plugs and made the connection. And, as business was not very brisk in the country exchange that morning, she let her curiosity get the better of her and listened in for a moment; perhaps in violation of the ethics of her calling, but who will blame her? However, she gleaned nothing from the short conversation.

"This you, Crothers?" grunted Carton. "This is Carton speaking."

"Um-huh," returned Crothers, with a snort in his tones.

"I want to talk with you—on a bit of important business. Can you come over to my house?"

"I'm due at the bank in twenty minutes," replied Crothers, who, besides being a deacon of the First Congregational Church, was president of Crawtown's reorganized bank;—reorganized some twenty years since, after ex-President McLaughlin's sensational disappearance—the wreck of his institution left behind him.

"I can't come there," said Carton. "It's too public. But this is an important matter, Crothers, and a little out of the regular line. I can't tell you more over the wire. But you'd better drop in and see me."

Crothers made no reply, but he evidently decided to "drop in" at Carton's office, for a passer-by on fashionable Elmwood Avenue might have seen him turn

from the sidewalk and dodge hastily in through Carton's doorway some ten minutes after the telephone conversation. Carton's office had no sign; for his wife, as a leader in Crawtown's society, refused to allow a business sign over the door of an office in her well-kept house. She would have preferred that he keep his offices down-town, but that did not suit her husband's convenience. However, a sign is simply a form of advertisement, and Carton needed little of that. Every one who dealt in his line, which was real estate and mortgages, with more stress on the latter word, knew where Carton could be found in business hours.

Carton rose at Crothers' entrance and extended his hand, which the deacon did not appear to see. Neither did he return Carton's affable smile. He made it plain that he wanted no pleasantries, but was there solely for purposes of business.

"Well," he grunted, "I'm here, but I'm in a hurry. I'm late at the bank now. What do you want, anyway?"

"Come, come, take a seat," snapped his host impatiently. "I guess the bank will still get along if you should be a few minutes late. Have you seen the *Banner* this morning?"

"What, that rotten sheet?" growled Crothers. "There was a copy around the house, but I wouldn't waste my time reading that drivel of Hunkus'. He's

a damned anarchist, anyway—ought to be carrying a red flag in Chicago, or Cleveland, or Paterson, New Jersey; he belongs with that radical crowd."

Carton knew that Crothers disliked the *Banner* because it had seen fit to support a real estate man instead of a banker in the election, and, while Carton did not care particularly for Hunkus, he was fair enough to admit that the red-headed editor was probably responsible for his election as State Senator. However, he made no comment on the deacon's outburst, but shoved over the morning's edition of the paper, his finger pointing at an article in the advertising section of the sheet. It was only a stick or so of form, and read:

> "*Wanted:*—Volumes 6 & 7, of Quarnoton's Scientific Work; left with Patrick McLaughlin some years since. Fair price will be paid, either, both volumes. Inquire BANNER office."

Crothers adjusted his eye-glasses and read the lines slowly—then looked blankly at Carton.

"Well, what of it?" he snapped. "I never heard of such books; probably McLaughlin took 'em along with the rest of the stuff he got away with. I don't see that it interests me in any way."

"No?" said the other, politely but coldly. "Well, let's see if we can recall a few things that might awaken your interest. They call me a hard man,

some of them who've mortgaged their property to me, but, by God, my skirts are clean, anyway."

"What do you mean?" snarled the deacon, his apoplectic cheeks growing even redder. "Don't you talk that way to me, Smithfield Carton; I won't stand it."

"I mentioned no names," said Carton, "and made no insinuations that would necessarily implicate you, did I? Ah, I thought not. Calm your angry passions, Deacon; they are unbecoming to a man of your cloth. There's another thing,—I never joined a church, either; probably I'm the worse for that."

Crothers glanced suspiciously, looking for the sneer. But the other's face was impassive, his voice passionless, without inflection scarcely.

"It's twenty years since Pat McLaughlin skipped this town, Crothers. My, what a sensation that was. I was a newcomer in town then; so new I hadn't even transferred my deposits from the bank in the place I came from. I guess it was a lucky thing for me. Let's see, Crothers; what was it the bank paid on the dollar—seven cents, wasn't it? You were on the old directorate, and a stockholder, of course; you should remember."

"I don't remember," said Crothers, in impatient voice. "I know it nearly cleaned me out at the time. But I didn't come here to talk about a forgotten bank failure."

"I remember that you were pretty well on the rocks

at that time," remarked Carton quietly, as if half to himself. "But you made a quick recovery—you and some others—and it wasn't long until your head was above water again. That was good business; I respect your abilities, Deacon. But I didn't call you here exactly to speak of that. But doesn't it occur to you, on reading this little ad, that perhaps that old bank failure, which you speak of as forgotten, isn't quite so forgotten as it might be? Eh? How about it, Crothers?"

The other started ever so slightly, but keen eyes would have noticed the movement. Whether or not Carton did was impossible to tell, though he was looking at the other all the while. But when the bank president spoke, it was in the same placid voice he used in his directors' meetings.

"Really, I don't quite get your meaning, Carton. You've been working pretty hard lately; and doubtless your political campaign was fatiguing also. Hadn't you better rest up a few weeks, or see a specialist, or something? You're not acting just like yourself, are you?"

"No, perhaps not," answered Carton. "But don't let that worry you. However, if I didn't make myself clear, I will endeavor to do so. Old books, 'left with Patrick McLaughlin some years since,' reads the advertisement. Sometimes men, especially simple, guileless fellows like McLaughlin always seemed, have a habit of leaving important documents, etc., around in

just such old books. Or maybe they scratch down pertinent little notes on the fly-leaves. Such notes, or documents, might prove troublesome, in certain cases. And assuming, for purposes of argument, that in this case something like that has happened, naturally any interested parties would be apt to look up the books, wouldn't they?"

Crothers sighed, so low it was hardly to be heard. But not a muscle of his broad face moved as he looked steadily at the State Senator.

"Very interesting, Carton, very. Though it wouldn't concern me in any way. But, assuming such a state of facts, why, tell me, did you approach me with such a suggestion?"

Carton shrugged his shoulders and flung out his white hands—a peculiar gesture, more French than American.

"Did it ever occur to you that political campaigns are expensive to the ordinary citizen who doesn't control a bank? Your income probably permits of more, well, let us call it extravagance, than does mine. And I don't mind telling you I am pretty well tied up for ready cash just now;—oh, plenty of property, plenty; but nothing I care to offer as collateral. And I might want, a little later, to borrow a few thousand or so, on my note, for a little time."

The banker drew on his gloves and picked up his soft hat from the table. All this time he looked at the

floor—and Carton out through the window, into the deserted street. As Crothers laid his hand on the door-knob he spoke.

"Drop around to the bank any morning. Our directors have always been sorry that you, a leading citizen, did not avail yourself of the facilities of our institution. We should be glad to have you open an account with us, as we would any citizen of Crawtown. As for the other matter, we are always very liberal with our depositors, Mr. Carton. That has always been our policy."

Outside in the street, as he walked down the sidewalk, stabbing the inoffensive concrete with his umbrella point, Crothers was muttering to himself; and some of his expressions would have surprised his fellow deacons in the First Congregational Church.

"Damn him, what does he know, anyway? He's been around the county a lot since he got into politics, and the Lord knows what he may have picked up. Well, they'd be a damned long while proving anything at this late date. However, I'll see Hodges and Perley at once. These confounded books now, advertised in the *Banner*. I must buy a copy and cut that out to show the boys. Wonder how much Carton knows about this ad, anyway;—enough so he thinks I'll recommend a loan on his bare note. The dirty bribe offerer. Well, we'll let him have the money—we'll see a chance to put the screws on later."

While, back in his office, Carton was smiling coldly at two bank-books he had taken from a small wall-safe. One was on an institution in Boston, the other on a New York trust company. The figures at the foot of the credit column in each book were over five in number.

"I got his goat," he said, inelegantly. "The psalm singing old hypocrite. Thinks I'm hard up for money and selling my knowledge to get an easy loan. Must size me up for a fool." His laugh was bitter.

"Well," he went on, "of course I don't know a single thing. But I've got suspicions; same as I've had for twenty years; and I think this ad will lead to something I want to know. If it does, damn you, Sammy Crothers, and you, too, Harry Hodges, and that sneaking little rat of a Digby Perley, I'll crush you,"—his voice hissed in a savage snarl; a brave man might well have stepped back at the vicious look on the man's hard face. Then he came to himself as he caught a glimpse of his face in the glass on the wall. Abruptly his features straightened out, though the traces of a bitter smile remained about his thin lips.

"Don't be melodramatic, old man," he whispered to himself. "Control yourself. You'll get them yet." Then he suddenly slumped down in a chair, his face in his folded arms on the table. And actually his shoulders were shaking with sobs. His debtors, even his wife, would have been surprised had they seen this

cold, hard man break down thus. Probably they would have refused to believe their very eyes.

"Oh, Mildred," he was whispering over and over. "Little sister Mildred. Why should such things have happened to you, who never harmed a soul?"

The little ad was being noticed by others also that morning. A big man with reddish whiskers, who was addressed by his companion as Professor, sat on the deck of the small steamer that ran between Rockland and Sanoset and read it with apparent interest. It had been pointed out to him by his aforesaid companion, a sharp-eyed little chap who apparently missed nothing, either in the papers he read or in the life of the world flowing on about them.

"Glad you noticed this," said the Professor. "Make a note of it, will you? Six and seven were the numbers of the missing volumes that probably are needed to make out the cipher. Of course, there may be others interested, but I suspect this ad was inserted by Hildegarde and her mysterious husband. Well, we know she has no money, and I doubt if this husband has any, either. And if I get the land,—well, they'll have to treat with us then, surely."

"I doubt if she's married," said the secretary, as he seemed to be. "I don't believe in these sudden marriages, so I've been skeptical since she first 'phoned her mother. You'll pardon me, Professor Gibbs, but you and Mrs. DeForest are mistaken in that girl. She's

not the weak, clinging type of woman; she's a fighter, and as shrewd as they make them. She doesn't want her mother to marry again, and also she believes that she's being robbed of her heritage."

The Professor colored just a little, if it was possible for his florid countenance to color.

"If she isn't married she's in rather an awkward position," he answered. "Her mother is sole executrix of her father's will, and, as such, has control of those books until Hildegarde's marriage, by the plain terms of that document. DeForest must have been an eccentric fellow, but the will holds all right. I suppose he thought a husband would stand behind the girl, whereas alone she might rush off on a wild goose chase, and make a bad mess of things. If she isn't married, and has taken those books under false pretenses, she is certainly liable; I don't know but that even a charge of grand larceny would lie."

"But no jury would convict on it; even if her mother stood for such a thing," returned the other.

"Oh, of course it wouldn't be pushed to the limit. But I think she'd be badly frightened. Well, we'll know soon; for, if I'm not mistaken, there is Sanoset harbor just around that point. It won't be long before we get into touch with this lawyer chap and see what he can do for us. I suppose young Tarbox is still hanging around; but I couldn't trust a boy like that with a deal of this importance."

Skilayton Ray, in his little law office, propped up with feet on the desk, was talking with Dr. Brack, who had dropped in for a morning chat. He, too, had noticed the advertisement; but it made no particular impression upon him. Though he strongly suspected young Somers had caused it to go in, since that young man had asked him who the best authority in the vicinity on old books might be, also as to who was the man most apt to be familiar with old bits of county history. To tell the truth, Ray was considerably mystified by several little things that had taken place.

"There's something I'm not wise to yet, Tabby," he told the doctor. "And seeing that ad this morning, with poor old Patrick McLaughlin's name in it, was like a voice from the grave to me. The best American ever born in Ireland, and you can never make me think he wrecked that Crawtown bank. I knew him awfully well; why, after he left, I——" then the lawyer bethought himself and stopped short. There are some things you should not even tell your best friend. Ray was confused, and the physician stared at him in surprise. Luckily there was an interruption at the moment—some client after two dollars' worth of advice, probably, and Dr. Brack got up to go.

"By the way," he said, just before he went through the doorway, "I've a new patient down at the hotel. Chap named Tarbox; he's been under the weather for a day or so, and they just called me in this morning.

Seems to have a bad case of nerves; he's hard as a rock physically, and I can't quite understand it. Why, say, he's a friend of your man, young Somers; in fact, it was Somers who called me in."

Ray, in the act of greeting his client, some prosperous farmer from his looks, turned completely around and stared at his friend. Then he whistled—a long, perplexed whistle.

"Remember when you were in here day before yesterday," he said, "I showed you a telegram from a fellow named Gibbs, in which he told me not to deal with Tarbox until he arrived. I took Tarbox for one of a firm in Boston I've had correspondence with; but I couldn't make head nor heel of the wire, not knowing who Gibbs might be, or that Tarbox was coming here. Now you say you've a patient named Tarbox sick at the hotel. That explains, maybe, why he hasn't called on me since he's been here. But it's queer that Somers didn't speak of him. And where does this Gibbs come in?"

"Don't ask me," returned his friend. "I try to be a doctor, not a detector;" and laughing heartily, Brack turned down the hallway and disappeared. Before Ray had settled into his seat, however, Millie Colleen tapped lightly upon her door.

"Excuse me, uncle,"—she always addressed her guardian in that manner,—"but may I have the *Banner*, if you're through with it?" She carried the news-

ɔer back to her desk in the main office and began ıning through its columns. People read a country ɔer thoroughly usually, and in due time she came to advertising section and, glancing idly through it, ne upon the little ad that had interested so many ıers that same morning. At first she glanced care-ɜly at the few lines—Patrick McLaughlin's name ant nothing to Millie Colleen, and she had never :n heard of the Crawtown Bank failure so many ırs before. But the peculiar title of the volumes led for attracted her attention. "Quarnoton's Sci-:ific Work;" and Volumes Six and Seven were nted. Where had she seen that name? Not in her ardian's law library, certainly, nor among his books the big, cool house a little ways up the street. Then ldenly it flashed across her memory; the books in little black trunk up attic at home. She ew vaguely it was her trunk, and as a child she had :en played with it on rainy afternoons. But it was ars now since she had looked into it, and she did not nember its contents very clearly. She looked at the ɔsed door of the private office. Probably her uncle ɔuld not want her for half an hour, and it would take s than fifteen minutes to dash up the street, into the l attic, and take a hasty peep at the trunk. Acting on impulse, she flashed out of the office, carrying newspaper with her. Five minutes later, by an en window of Ray's immense attic, she was

unstrapping a musty-smelling trunk with nimble fingers.

There at the bottom were the two old volumes, with the faded covers. With trembling fingers now she opened the pages of the first one. There was the name, printed in old-style type upon the title-page. The leaf was yellowed by time; it was hard to decipher the words even by the window where the morning sun streamed through.

But she read enough to make sure, then turned to the little ad in the *Banner*. "Quarnoton's Scientific Work—Volumes 6 & 7"; surely that was what it called for. Again she looked at the title-page, and there it was, in the quaint old lettering: "Ten Volumes Relating to the Arts and the Sciences; by Richard Quarnoton, Esquire." And underneath, in smaller type—"This Being the Seventh Volume." Hastily she turned to the other book, and, yes; it was Volume Six.

Two minutes later an excited girl stole down the broad steps of Skilayton Ray's attic, with two musty volumes, well wrapped from the eyes of the world, in the morning's issue of that well-known country paper, the Crawtown *Banner*.

CHAPTER VIII

MILLIE COLLEEN LENDS HER AID

DICKIE TARBOX sat up in bed and punched the wall-bell viciously. While he awaited an answer to his summons he looked disconsolately out of the window, which looked down on a deserted stable-yard two stories below. A strong odor from the aforesaid stable was wafted to the young man's nostrils; ordinarily he would probably have been very much disgusted, but now he noticed it not at all. He had too much else on his mind to worry over petty things. Without thinking of it particularly, he noticed that one great branch of the elm at the stable's corner grew so near to his window that it would have been no feat at all to leap from the sill to the limb and thence to descend to the ground via that which could literally be called a trunk route. So worried, however, was the young fellow that he could not attempt even the semblance of a smile as the pun, which was probably poor, flashed through his mind.

Presently—which at the Titus House meant at most not over fifteen minutes—footsteps could be heard in a shambling climb up the stairways and down the hall to

his door, upon which there was a resounding knock. Following the knock the door opened slowly and the clerk thrust his head into the room.

"Well, come all the way in," snapped Tarbox ungraciously. "Hand me that bromide on the washstand, will you; that pink stuff in the little bottle? And pour me some water. Thanks." He gurgled the medicine down with a wry face; it was a dose that Dr. Brack had prescribed to quiet his patient's nerves. The doctor was a clever man, but he did not have a fair show in the present case; had he known that the young man's trouble was mental, and brought on by overmuch worry, he perhaps would have given him different treatment.

"Ever been up against it?" asked Tarbox abruptly, and glaring at the clerk who stood by the bedside weakly twisting his little moustache. The man stared.

"Well, never mind. If you ever are, take a fool's advice, and play up to it like a man. Don't be a baby. Take it from one who knows and who's been playing the baby game the last forty-eight hours. Gad; I didn't know a man could break up so."

The clerk continued to stare, even as he slowly backed toward the doorway. He had no idea what the man in bed was talking about, and rather wondered if Tarbox was not just a bit crazy.

"Say, don't hustle off so," went on Tarbox. "I want to see Mr. Somers;—call him, will you?"

"Mr. Somers went out about an hour ago," returned the other. "His wife was with him."

"Well, I'll have to do it myself, then. Where do you send a wire from in this town, anyway?"

"There's no telegraph office here, sir. You have to 'phone over to Crawtown, the county seat. There's a Western Union office over there."

"Well, I suppose I can 'phone it from the office down-stairs, can't I? If there aren't too many around listening."

"There isn't a soul in the house, sir. You and Mr. Somers and his wife are the only guests. Except a couple that came this morning—and they're out on the piazza now. That makes me think, sir, one of 'em inquired for you;—I told him you'd been sick for a couple of days and were lying down now. Big man with red whiskers; registered as Gibbs."

"Gibbs!" roared Tarbox, kicking aside the coverlet in his excitement. "So he's here, is he?"

"Yes, sir. Would you like to see him, sir? He appears to be anxious to talk with you."

"Not just at present," sighed Tarbox, lying down in the bed again. "I'm not up to seeing anybody just now. If he asks for me again tell him I'm under the doctor's care and can't see anybody for a while."

"Very well, Mr. Tarbox," said the clerk, looking a trifle surprised, however. "Then you don't wish to telephone just at present?"

"Damn it, I'm too sick to telephone," snapped Tarbox. "If I can't even talk with anybody, how the deuce can I telephone? Say, do you want to do a man a good turn; a sick man? What's your name, anyway?"

"Titus, sir."

"Titus?" asked Tarbox, surprised in his turn. Somehow he could not think of this pale, stoop-shouldered individual as even the son of a bluff old sea-dog who had commanded deep-water ships and sailed to China and the ends of the world, such as they had understood the builder of this house to be. "You're not the proprietor?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm his second cousin, that's all."

"Well, Titus, if you want to earn a sick man's eternal gratitude, do you suppose you could rustle me up a drink of good whiskey somewhere? 'Twould do me more good than all the medicines on that bureau. And I think you'll find a two-dollar bill in my pants hanging over that chair. Keep that for your trouble."

Titus looked doubtful. Still, Tarbox noted with satisfaction that he moved slowly toward the indicated chair and began searching in the pockets of the trousers. As his fingers touched the bill and brought it out to the light of day, an expression of determination spread over his weak but good-natured countenance.

"I know where there's a pint. It belongs to the cook, and he's a big fellow; he'd kill me if he knew I

stole his whiskey. But if you'll never say anything, I guess I can get it for you."

"Mum is the word," promised Tarbox. "But, say, there's another dollar in that pocket. Take it, and leave it in the place where you get the bottle. That ought to pay the cook. I wouldn't want to rob the man."

Five minutes later the clerk returned with some uncertain looking liquid in a small glass flask. Also he brought information.

"Here's your whiskey. Also, I saw Mr. Gibbs down-stairs. He says it's very important he see you for just a moment;—says he won't disturb you a bit. What'll I tell him?"

Tarbox sparred desperately for time. It was impossible that he see Gibbs; at least until he had sent his wire and made arrangements with his Boston broker. But no wonder Gibbs was insistent upon seeing him; and how should he put it off? As he pondered he swallowed a large half-tumblerful of the liquor. Even as the scalding stuff choked down his throat, the idea came to him.

"Tell Gibbs I'm getting my clothes on. I'll see him inside of half an hour. And much obliged for getting me the,—well—what the cook calls whiskey."

The clerk had hardly closed the door when Tarbox was out of bed and rapidly drawing on his clothes. He was still weak and nervous, and the drink of raw

whiskey he had swallowed served to make him just a bit light-headed. As he dressed he talked incessantly to himself.

"What a fool I was to break up so. The money's gone, and I've got to make good, that's all. Should have attended to things before. But, darn it, the thing's knocked me plain silly. And I can't face Gibbs until I can arrange to replace the money. He's a savage old boy; might think I'd stolen the stuff and was putting up a bluff. I don't know but he'd have me arrested, first crack. Gee, I wish I could talk with Chick Somers a minute. Well, here goes."

He struggled into his overcoat, pulled on his hat, but did not notice, in his excitement, that he had neglected to put on a collar and scarf. With a few quick movements he swept the articles that lay about the room into his bag and snapped the lock. Then he tiptoed over and turned the key in the door. Bethinking, he thrust a ten-dollar bill into the water glass on the bureau in plain sight. "Don't want to be pulled in for beating my hotel bill," he muttered, and forgetting that, except for a little small change, it left him penniless. True, he had a check-book; but what good is a check-book in a strange town, where you do not know a soul, and people are inclined to be skeptical?

He took a cautious look out the window. Nobody was about the stable apparently, or in the yard in

front of it. And the ell of the house was hidden from the street in front of the hotel. For a moment, though, as he half leaned from the window, he almost decided to give up his plan. It was all of a good twenty feet to hard-baked ground below, and the gently swaying branch of the great elm did not just now seem quite so near. And he was a man just out of bed, weak from two days of confinement and worry, and not yet recovered from a bad attack of nerves. Then, getting a grip over those same shattered nerves, he tried to laugh scornfully, and dropped his hand-bag, which fell with a dull thud upon the ground below. Even as it struck he climbed upon the sill and leaped—swooped in the air the fraction of a second like some big, clumsy bird —and found himself clasping the limb with both arms and kicking his legs wildly in the effort to wrap them around it also. A moment later he slid safely into the crotch of the big tree. It had not been such a hazardous feat after all, and so far as he could observe, his leap had attracted no attention.

However, he soon found out his mistake. As he slid ungracefully down the shaggy sided tree, rasping his hands upon the rough bark and covering his clothes with dirt, he heard a smothered but distinctly astonished cough. And as his feet touched the ground he found himself looking into the eyes of a young lady, who carried some sort of a package in her arms, over the top of which she stared at him in wonderment. It

did not particularly relieve his apprehensions to find that she seemed fully as startled as he was himself.

"Well," said Tarbox, and stopped. For one time in his life he was at a loss for words. Then, suddenly, the girl smiled; and in the moment he felt appreciably better. Surely he had nothing to fear from a girl who could smile like that.

"Do you always come out that way?" she asked, and glanced at the open window and the bag, tipped on its side upon the ground. Tarbox answered, speaking very fast.

"I suppose it looks funny," he said. "But I can explain, though not here. At least, though, I'll assure you, I'm not a thief or a second-story man. Neither am I trying to skip my hotel bill."

She said nothing though she still continued to smile. Tarbox felt that she was laughing at him, and that he must present a rather ridiculous figure. Then a new doubt assailed him.

"You don't work here in the hotel, do you?" he asked quickly. The girl's smile faded; she even looked angry.

"Do I look like one of the waitresses?" she asked. "Or perhaps you take me for the cook?"

"Not the cook, surely," said Tarbox. "I know, that is, I've been told on good authority, that the cook is a man—a big man. And I'm positive he's a poor

judge of whiskey. But, I beg your pardon, I'm sure, if I've said anything to offend you."

The girl looked him over rather curiously. "You don't look it," she said finally.

"Don't look what?" he inquired, puzzled.

"As if you'd been drinking. I really didn't know. Considering the situation, and your last remark, I ——" and she stopped abruptly.

"No, I haven't been. At least, not to any extent. Nor am I out of my senses. But if I'm to explain, can't we talk somewhere else? Somebody might come along."

"Somebody's very likely to," she answered. "But you don't have to explain to me. However, if you want to get out of sight you'd better go into the stable; there's a back way out on a side street."

"Thanks," said Tarbox dryly. "Would you mind coming with me?" He picked up his bag. "I'm quite harmless, really—and, in fact, where I come from, they consider me a respectable member of the community. And, if I may, I'd like to ask a few questions; also to convince you I've really good reason for leaving the hotel the way you caught me."

She hesitated, but only for a moment. "Very well," she said calmly. "But you'll have to hurry. I've got to get back to the office; Mr. Ray may want me."

They had turned into a big, sunny barn-floor, with a

few horses nibbling in stalls along one side, and sweet-smelling lofts of hay overhead. Now Tarbox leaned weakly against the wall and stared at his companion.

"Ray? Skilayton Ray, the lawyer? You don't mean that you work for him?"

"But I do. I'm his stenographer; also his ward. I live at his house. Why, do you know him?"

"Can't say that I do. But I came down here to Sanoset to see him. My name is Tarbox; I'm a real estate man from Boston."

She looked at him, and it was a rather doubtful look. He immediately plunged into explanation.

"You see, it's this way. I was sent down here to see him for one of our clients, who is interested in some land down this way which Mr. Ray is in charge of. I'm with my father in business—Tarbox & Tarbox, of Boston; real estate, you know. It was quite a big deal, and I had the money with me in cash; twenty thousand dollars. It was in this bag. I ran across some friends on the boat, Chick Somers and his wife; in fact, we all came over from Rockland together. Coming down on the boat I had a wireless from the man I was acting for, telling me to do nothing until he saw me; seems he had decided to come on himself.

"This bag wasn't out of my sight more than two minutes from the time I left the boat in Rockland, except when Chick Somers had it, and I'd trust him with everything I possess. Yet the money disappeared.

I don't understand it yet. Somebody must have got into the bag and stolen it, though I can't conceive how. But, naturally, when I found it was gone, it came as a good deal of a shock. In fact, on top of everything else, it broke me up pretty badly. I've been ill as a result—sick in bed in that confounded hotel for two days, and under the care of the doctor down here; Brack, you know."

The girl evidently accepted his story. She burst out impulsively in words of sympathy. "I've met Mr. Somers, too, at the office," she finished. "I like him, and his wife is charming. And I remember a telegram, too, that came for uncle from a man named Gibbs. It instructed him not to deal with you until Gibbs came on himself."

"And that's just it. You see, Gibbs is here—came this morning. Naturally, he wants to see me; to get his money, I suppose. Of course, I'm responsible for that, and must make the loss good. Luckily, too, I can do it from my own money; I have a little, though this will about clean me out. But to get that money I'd have to wire my broker in Boston, and sell some stocks I've invested in. But, being knocked out for two days, I haven't sent word to him. And I simply can't face Gibbs until I've made arrangements to get the money for him. And he was coming up to my room. So I left it by the window and the tree. Now I've got to steer clear of him until I make my

arrangements. So you see what I'm up against. And I guess that's all." Then, with a little, ashamed laugh, he added a few more words to his explanation.

"I'm not quite a baby. It wasn't just losing that money that knocked me out—though that was bad enough. But, well, you see, I've been going it pretty stiff all winter, and I guess my nerves were pretty well frazzled. When this thing came I just went to pieces. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. But, believe me, 'twill be a lesson all around, both on carelessness and, well, other things. If I get through this I'm going to turn a new leaf."

The girl said nothing for a moment. She seemed to be thinking. Finally she spoke, and her tone was serious.

"You are in a scrape, aren't you? And dodging Mr. Gibbs, though I hardly blame you for that, is going to make it worse. He may think you've run off with the money, and you can't tell what he'll do. I don't see but that you must hide somewhere until things can be straightened out a bit. Mr. Somers will help, I suppose, if he's a friend of yours. But about sending that wire to your broker; how is he to know it's from you? He'll probably want to make sure, by some means or other, that everything's all right."

"By George, I never thought of that," admitted Tarbox ruefully. He looked at the girl with increased

respect; plainly here was a woman who was capable. "Say, I am in a mess, ain't I?" he asked ingenuously. "And I've surely made a fool of myself all around the block."

On top of his admission he grinned. He was young, and they say the young throw off troubles more or less easily. And the girl—she was also young—smiled back at him. But there was a little, perplexed frown underlying her smile.

"I'm wondering what to do with you," she began. Tarbox gasped; already she had taken him under her wing, so to speak. Evidently she considered he was incapable of acting for himself, at least in a time like this.

"Please don't bother," he hastened to say. "I'll get along some way. I'll send a letter to Williams,—that's the broker; I can explain things to him in a letter all right. And until I hear from him I'll keep out of Gibbs' sight; I can put up somewhere." He thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out—two dimes, a battered quarter, and a few coppers. For one moment he looked blank.

"I guess I do need a guardian," he then remarked sheepishly. "Appears like I'm broke. Unless you can get a check cashed for me somewhere. I've got my check-book here."

"And I don't know where you could go, anyway," she said. "The Titus House is our only hotel. Mr.

Gibbs, you say, is there. And he's the one man you don't want to see just now. But I have an idea. If you'll come with me, I can hide you for a while all right, until I can see Mr. Somers. No doubt he can straighten things out by explaining to Mr. Gibbs, or something."

"I can't allow you to trouble yourself," protested Tarbox. "Really, I'll get along some way. I'm not, er, well, such a fool as I must appear. And you mustn't bother over me."

"It's no bother, Mr. Tarbox," she laughed. "Really, if I wasn't as sorry for you as I am, losing that money and all, I should think it a great lark. It's just the way things happen in stories. We weren't allowed to read them at the convent, when I was at school, but some of the girls used to smuggle them in. And down here in sleepy old Sanoset, too; why nothing ever happens in Sanoset. You get up, eat three times a day, and go back to bed again. Nothing ever happens here."

"It's been lively enough for me so far," commented Tarbox. He was following the girl out through the deserted stable. She led him across a side street and into the back yard of an immense white house that stood far back from the street. They passed through a door in the rear into a long shed.

"Quietly now, so no one will hear," she whispered. "I'm going to put you up attic; this is uncle's house—

where I live. You can stay here safely until I talk with Mr. Somers."

"But I don't want to, well, you know, compromise you in any way," he still protested.

"Pshaw. If people should know it, they'd say it was just that harum-scarum Millie Colleen again. Good-bye for now."

She had left him in a big, old-fashioned attic. It was not until the echo of her footsteps had died away that he noticed she had left her package—two books, rolled up in a newspaper that had come undone. For want of anything better to do he picked up the paper and became immersed in its contents.

CHAPTER IX

A DISCOVERY IN RAY'S ATTIC

WHEN Chichester Somers and Hildegarde DeForest entered Squire Ray's outer office the morning after their interview with Editor Hunkus of the *Banner*, they found the old lawyer puffing and blowing angrily, while he pounded out a letter upon a typewriter with clumsy and unaccustomed fingers. He looked up with a scowl.

"Oh, good-morning. I thought it might be that confounded niece of mine, Millie Colleen. She acts as my stenographer, you know. And, plague take it, she's gone off somewhere, just as I wanted her to do some writing. And I never did get the hang of one of these confounded machines."

"Why don't you use a pen, then?" asked Somers, smiling.

"Pen?" snapped Ray. "I'm worse with a pen than I am with one of these type-smiting affairs. Why, I suppose I can pound out a letter on this thing in time that will be at least readable. But my best friends say they can't read my writing, and I can't blame them. Sometimes it puzzles me, when it's cold."

With old-fashioned gallantry, however, even while he sputtered, the lawyer had risen to place a chair for the lady. As he bowed her into it the telephone jangled shrilly.

"Hulloa," roared Ray, snatching off the receiver.

"Yes, this is Ray's office; no, not Judge Ray—no titles in this shop. Plain Lawyer Ray."....

"Who'd you say? Gibbs?"..... His back was toward his visitors, consequently he did not see their sudden start.

"No, he ain't been here. I heard such a man was in town—but he's sick, at the hotel. Hah? You don't say?".....

"You better come down to my office; anybody'll tell ye where it is," after the man at the other end of the wire had talked for some moments. "Who was it you said last?".....

"Mr. and Mrs. Chichester? Never heard of 'em."....

"You're coming right down;—all right." He hung up the receiver. Then he shot a peculiar glance at the two young people.

"You know a young fellow named Tarbox, who's been sick, down at the hotel, don't you?" he asked, abruptly.

Somers was taken aback at the question. However, he nodded.

"Yes, I know him. Why, what's the matter?"

"Well, it seems he's just skipped out of his room at the hotel, through a window and down a tree. And that man who just talked with me, Gibbs is his name, says this Tarbox has got about twenty thousand dollars of his money, which he wants to get hold of. He thinks this chap, Tarbox, has skipped with it."

"Skipped—out of his window," exclaimed Somers in astonishment. "What in the dickens did he do that for?"

"That's what this Gibbs wants to know. I judge he's pretty hot—way he talked over the 'phone. He's coming down here now."

"Gibbs coming here?" exclaimed the two.

"You heard what I said. Probably he's on his way now."

"But we mustn't let him see us," exclaimed the girl, springing up. "Not now. It might spoil everything."

Ray stared at her open-mouthed. Then he stepped over, between the two and the door.

"Strikes me there's some explaining due here," he began. "And by the way, this Gibbs asked if I knew anything of a Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Chichester, who'd lately come down this way. I thought that name sounded familiar, and now I've got it. That's your first name, Mr. Somers."

The girl was looking at Somers appealingly. He laid a strong hand upon the lawyer's arm.

"Now look here, Mr. Ray. We can explain everything to you at the proper time, but not now. It's important that this man Gibbs doesn't see my, er, wife, just at present. So we've got to get out of here. I hope you'll take my word I'll explain things to you—and that everything's all right. But if you won't, why, we're going out anyway."

"Look here, Somers," returned the lawyer. "You're a husky young man. Probably you could throw me out of my own office, if you wanted to. But you can't scare me—one little bit. However, Rowl Bridger was my friend; and you're his nephew. If you give me your word that everything is all right—I won't ask any questions just now."

At that moment there was a commotion in the hallway outside; a door slammed, and there was the thud of hurrying feet. Somers thrust out his hand.

"Here's my hand on it, Mr. Ray. But it's too late now. I'm afraid friend Gibbs is just outside."

"Follow me," commanded the lawyer, and hustled them into the private office. There he pointed to a door.

"That goes into the hallway. Gibbs will come into the main office; I'm going out now to receive him, and I'll shut the door after he comes in. Then you two make tracks out through the hall, and don't make any noise, either. I'll see you later."

Somers and the girl waited in breathless silence

after he went out. They heard the footsteps coming down the hallway; evidently two men, Gibbs and a companion. What if Gibbs should not stop at the first door to the main office, but should continue on and burst in to Ray's private doorway? Then they heard the door to the main office swing back with a bang, and a stentorian voice boomed a question. The questioner evidently was in a rage. Somers glanced inquiringly at his companion.

"It's the Professor," she whispered. "Professor Gibbs. It must be his secretary with him. Listen."

"Is this Mr. Ray?" roared the big voice.

"It is," returned that individual, rather testily. "What's the matter with you anyway; do you think I'm deaf?"

"I'm Gibbs," returned the voice. "My secretary, sir."

"Well, come in," snapped the lawyer. "And shut the door behind you. There're other tenants on this floor, you know; I don't monopolize it."

Somers would have given worlds to listen just now. But, under the circumstances, it was hardly prudent. He opened their door a crack. The hallway seemed clear. They scuttled down it on tiptoe, — two scared chickens, Somers thought ruefully, running from a hawk. As they went through the outside doorway they nearly bumped into a breathless girl rushing in. It was Millie Colleen, Ray's missing

stenographer. And to Somers' surprise, for he barely knew the girl, she laid both hands upon his arm, and stopped him. "Oh, Mr. Somers," she gasped out.

"Sh," returned Somers hastily. "Not quite so loud. What's the matter, anyway?"

"I've been looking for you," the girl continued. Somers was amazed. Miss DeForest also seemed astonished.

"It's about Mr. Tarbox," faltered the girl.

"Tarbox? What about him?"

"Well, he left his room in the hotel by the window. It seems he didn't want to see a man who was looking for him, because he's lost some of that man's money. I thought you knew all about it, from the way he spoke. You see, I happened to see him coming down the tree from his window; so he told me his troubles. And I've hidden him in my attic—that is, in Mr. Ray's attic—until I could talk with you."

"The fool," exploded Somers, wrathfully. "No, no; I don't mean you, Miss Colleen. I'm referring to Tarbox. What in thunder did he want to do a thing like that for, anyway? He should have faced Gibbs, like a man."

"That's easy enough to say," returned Miss Colleen spiritedly. "But if you'd just lost twenty thousand dollars that you had of another man's money, perhaps you wouldn't want to face the man either, until you could make it good. Anyway, the thing's done

now. And somebody's got to help Mr. Tarbox out of his trouble. I thought of course you would."

"I'll do what I can, of course," said Somers. "But we can't stand talking here in the street. To tell the truth, there's a man in your uncle's office that we don't want to see just now for certain reasons. It's this same Gibbs, whom Dick Tarbox is dodging."

"And what shall we do?" said Hildegarde De-Forest, anxiously. "If we go back to the Titus House, we're sure to run into Gibbs, sooner or later. And we can't afford to do that. If he finds out we're not ——" she bit her lip, and looked at Miss Colleen in confusion.

"Is there another hotel in town?" asked Somers. Miss Colleen looked at the two for one long minute; then she burst into her merry, ringing laugh.

"I can hide you in our attic with Mr. Tarbox," she said. "Though I'm sure I can't imagine what it's all about. Have you lost some money of Mr. Gibbs', too?"

"Hardly that," said Somers. "Neither is it necessary that we hide. For certain reasons it will simply be better if Mrs. Somers and Professor Gibbs do not meet just now. Most certainly we'll go back to the Titus House, my dear," and he looked at his wife. Millie decided they must be newly married—only a bride (or a sweetheart) could blush in the way Mrs. Somers did as he spoke to her.

"But poor Mr. Tarbox, you must do something for him," Mrs. Somers said, smiling very sweetly at Millie as she addressed her husband.

"That's right, and I'll go see him—now, if Miss Colleen will show us the way."

Millie hesitated. Already she had been away from the office much longer than was prudent. Her foster uncle was a most lenient guardian; but she received no more favors in his office than would any other stenographer. It was not necessary that she work there; but so long as she chose to do so, their relations were strictly on a business basis during office hours. And Skilayton Ray could be stern when it pleased him, as others could testify besides his sprightly ward.

Even as she stood, cogitating the matter, the town clock, on the steeple of the Presbyterian Church around the corner, struck twelve clanging, resounding strokes —the hour of noon. The girl looked her dismay; she had not dreamed it was so late. Then the apprehensive look gave way to her usual smile.

"I'm in for a good scolding now. But I'll see uncle at dinner; he always feels better after he has eaten. And he'll be going home pretty soon now. So if you want to see Mr. Tarbox now, we'll have to hurry."

"I'll come too," said Hildegarde DeForest, and the three turned around the corner of the building for a

short cut Millie knew through a side street. It was fortunate they did so at that moment; for they had hardly disappeared when Professor Gibbs came out, gesticulating violently to Squire Ray, who walked beside him. The secretary, twisting and wiggling his neck, like a bright-eyed little bird, in his effort to catch all that was being said, trotted along behind the two.

"I'll take your advice, Mr. Ray, and not apply for a warrant, as I contemplated. As you point out, it is a firm of high standing, and this chap, Tarbox, is the son of its principal member. But, if this young man hasn't peculated, I can put no construction upon his most peculiar actions. He apparently left the room by jumping to a tree which grew near and descending upon its trunk; a most hazardous feat. Unless, of course, he has been drinking; there was a perceptible odor of alcohol in his room."

"I reckon you've hit it," said the lawyer. "This stuff they sell in town is poison; it's apt to be in a prohibition state. A couple of drinks, and a man is liable to do most anything."

"Well, I will wait a reasonable time for the young man to give an account of himself. Though it's really very annoying, as it possibly may cause me delay. I am anxious to close the deal for the property known as Owl's Point, with Little Clam Island, which I believe goes with it. I know Tarbox & Tarbox corresponded with you in regard to the matter; and they

were representing me. However, I have decided to appear in the transaction myself."

"Business in business hours," returned the lawyer. "You can see me at my office in regard to the matter. I wrote your agents that the property was not for sale; it is owned by several heirs in common, but the largest owner has always refused to negotiate, thus blocking the sale. But this man is recently deceased, and very likely his heir will be willing to sell, though I have not talked with him in regard to the matter."

"I am prepared to offer as much as any purchaser," said Gibbs, running his flabby, white hands through the parted, red beard. "By the way, sir; one more question. You have not been approached by a Mr. and Mrs. Chichester, I am positive that is the name, in regard to this land, have you?"

Ray shook his head. Outwardly he was impassive; inwardly, however, he fairly seethed in surmises.

"Possibly you may be. I can only say that it would hardly be safe to put any faith whatsoever in any offer these people might make for the land. We believe them to be passing themselves off as married, when in reality there has been no ceremony; and furthermore it is very likely that a charge of grand larceny may be brought against them. I am telling you this that you may be on your guard."

"Thanks," said the lawyer, dryly. "However, I

don't think I'm very easily imposed upon. I've had too many years at the trade."

They separated at the corner, Gibbs and his secretary going toward the Titus House; Ray turning into a cross street; the same into which Miss Colleen had led the others, a few minutes before. As the lawyer walked slowly homewards, through the hot sunshine of noonday, he was muttering to himself.

"I'd stake a good deal that young Somers is honest. But there are some funny things here. It's more than a coincidence, that Chichester business. But why should Somers, and his pretty young wife, have occasion to use an assumed name at all? This Tarbox business, too; and it seems very evident that Tarbox and Somers know each other. And Tarbox disappears with twenty thousand dollars of Gibbs' money. Well, Somers says he can explain; and I guess he'll have to—before I turn over one dollar of his estate, anyway."

As he unfastened the gate of the trim picket fence that fronted his grounds—Ray was old-fashioned enough to still stick to his fences—a new idea struck him. He stopped short, and slapped his knee with one pudgy hand.

"What in tunket is Gibbs doing with twenty thousand dollars down here, anyway? He can't want to put all that into this property, if he knows anything about land values at all. But what has he got such

a sum for, if he isn't prepared to go that high if necessary. There's certainly something about it I don't understand. Perhaps I ought to drive out and take a look at the property; I haven't seen it for years. And nobody else goes near it. There's certainly something mysterious about this matter."

As he opened the door he was struck with another idea. Evidently it pleased him, for he chuckled heartily as he stepped into his front hall. As he hung up his Panama hat on the rack he was again talking to himself; a habit he had formed from years of reading his briefs and other papers aloud to himself in his offices.

"I'll ask old Chandler, and see what he knows. His farm's the nearest place to that property. If anybody's struck a gold-mine out that way, he might know something about it, if it can be dragged out of him. I don't care much for gossips; but it's lucky everybody isn't as close-mouthed as Dill Chandler."

Mrs. Meder, his housekeeper, was awaiting him in the dining-room. "Where's Millie?" she asked.

"Isn't she here? She left the office about ten o'clock. Something she's never done before. I didn't know but that she might be sick."

"Well, she hasn't been home this morning, at least to my knowledge. And you're late yourself to-day, Mr. Ray." The good woman spoke rather fretfully. Her dinner was already cooked. And nothing annoys

the faithful housewife more than the keeping of a good dinner in waiting, after she has worked hard in its preparation.

"I was a little late in getting out of the office. Well, we won't wait for Millie. Probably she'll be home soon."

Had they but known, Millie was in the house that very moment; very cautiously, that Mrs. Meder (sharp-eared creature) might not overhear, she had escorted Somers and the woman she supposed his wife up the creaking, back stairway that led to the attic. There, a forlorn figure, huddled in an overcoat and sitting upon the floor was Tarbox. Compared with that immaculate gentleman who had registered at the Titus House but two short days before, he might have been some tramp of the better class. His clothing was wrinkled, and covered with dirt and sticky little fragments of bark and wood. He was collarless, and the untidy beard of forty-eight hours' existence covered his cheeks. However, he glanced up at his callers with a smile; but it was one of a forced and sickly nature.

"Not a word," he began, holding up his hands as if to ward off a blow. "You can't possibly call me anything, Chick, that I haven't named myself already. I didn't realize there were so many adjectives that applied to me in the whole dictionary, until I got off up here by myself, and began to run through them a

little. But the question is, what to do? I certainly shan't face Gibbs until I am able to hand him a check for twenty thousand dollars, now that I have dodged him in this way. And I can't do that until I write my broker; and then it may be several days before he can turn over my stuff and deposit that amount in the bank. And for all I know, Gibbs may be applying for a warrant against me now. But perhaps you can see him, Chick, and fix things up for me."

"That's just what I can't do," said Somers forcibly. "Oh, you needn't be surprised; I may have better reasons even than you for not wanting to see him. However, I can smuggle you in somewhere until you hear from your broker; meanwhile you'd better make yourself a little more presentable. Get a shave, and brush off your clothes. And for Heaven's sake put on a collar;—if Gibbs should see you now he'd surely think you were a thug."

Tarbox shot one hand to his throat, then groaned with an air of despair that was ludicrous. The three who looked could not restrain their mirth any longer, though they had sense enough to smother their laughter, that it might not disturb the house below.

"Well," remarked Tarbox resignedly. "Enjoy yourselves, I don't blame you. Under the circumstances I'm forced to be the goat. But I'm not the only one who forgets under stress of excitement. Why, you ran off and left your package behind, Miss

Colleen. I've had lots of enjoyment reading the paper you had wrapped around it."

Millie made a little exclamation, and stooped to pick up the books. But Somers was quicker; he stooped gallantly to get them for her. The words on a faded cover caught his eye. He turned rapidly to the title-page, and read, in his excitement, aloud. "'Ten Volumes Relating to the Arts and the Sciences; by Richard Quarnoton, Esquire. This Being the Seventh Volume.'" Below was written in a cramped hand the words: "Left with me for safe-keeping, by Capt. Rowland Bridger and Haven DeForest, Esq." And the girl, Hildegarde, looking over his shoulder, gave a little startled cry. The cramped writing was signed, "Patrick McLaughlin."

CHAPTER X

A MYSTERY ON THE ISLAND

SKILAYTON RAY was jogging down the pike road, as the hard white way along the shore was known. An omnivorous reader, his favorite character in American fiction, at least of the modern type, was that shrewd figure of rural story, "David Harum." Perhaps it was because he had one thing in common with that well-known character; he loved a good horse passionately. The bay gelding that drew Ray's light, Concord buggy was well known on local tracks, and had a mark indeed better than twenty—fast enough for any road horse. Ray was alone; he had business of a private nature, and did not care to even take his good friend, Dr. Brack, along for the ride. He was on his way to the farm of Dill Chandler, whose upper meadow skirted the edge of the peninsula known as Owl's Point, some miles outside the village proper. If possible the lawyer intended to find out why Professor Gibbs was willing to pay such an unheard-of price for a rocky point, and an island covered with boulders and spruces.

Dill Chandler was at home, smoking upon his porch

while resting a few moments from his planting. He greeted his caller pleasantly enough, though he did not rise from his seat.

"'Morning, Squire. You're looking well. Ain't seen you out this way for quite a while."

"I'm pretty busy at home," answered the lawyer, fastening his horse to the post by Chandler's front steps. "Fact is, I wouldn't be out here this morning, if it wasn't on business. Between you and me, Dill, there's some parties that want to buy the point out here, and Little Clam Island. I thought I'd come out and look it over, so's to be able to set a price on the property. You see, it's under my charge. And I thought maybe you'd come over with me this morning and help look it over, if you ain't too busy."

Chandler had smoked, with unmoved face, until the lawyer's last sentence. Then he took his pipe from his mouth abruptly and straightened up in his chair.

"You'll have to get somebody else," he replied, shortly. "I'll stay on my own farm, I guess."

Ray was surprised. Dill Chandler was close-mouthed, and close-fisted; but he was not usually a grouch, and in fact was ordinarily quite willing to be accommodating.

"Why, what's the matter, Dill?" he inquired, surprise showing in his tone.

"Nothing much," growled Chandler. "Only I've

learnt in my fifty odd years that it's a mighty good plan to mind my own business. Especially when there's things going on that I don't understand."

"What do you mean?" asked Ray. He adopted a puzzled air, but secretly he was more pleased than perplexed, for he scented information. And evidently he was to acquire it from the stubborn, uncommunicative farmer far easier than he had expected.

Chandler looked just a bit sheepish. He eyed the other from the corners of his sharp, old eyes. Ray waited patiently. "Squire, do you believe in the supernatural?" broke out Chandler at last.

Ray laughed a little. "How do you mean?" he asked. "Spiritualism? Or just plain ghosts?"

"I'm not a spiritualist," said Chandler. "I was brought up a plain Baptist. I don't know as I believe in ghosts either. But if your customers, whoever they are, want to keep their peace of mind, let 'em keep away from Little Clam Island, I say."

"Good Heavens," said Ray, pretending anxiety. "Don't noise such talk around, Dill. I don't want my sale spoiled. What's wrong with the island, anyway?"

"Well, peculiar noises, for one thing. After twilight they start—you can hear it from the edge of my pasture. I tell you, it's weird. Then, though I ain't seen anything myself, other folks have—my hired man, an' some others in the neighborhood. Queer

shapes, shining sort of ghastly like, have been seen from the shore road, flitting through the trees of the island; and you hear of other funny things."

"Bosh," snapped Ray. "Frogs make weird noises. And these queer shining shapes I reckon are caused as much from hard cider as from anything. Why haven't I heard of this before? Nobody down to Sanoset knows of it."

"There's no frog-pond on the island that I know of," said Chandler. "I've lived here all my life, an' never heard such noises before. My hired man doesn't drink even hard cider—he may have a vivid imagination; but anyway he's positively sure he's seen these things. And so are others. Why, the shore road isn't used at all now after nightfall—folks drive around over the hill. You couldn't hire anybody to go near that property after dark. As for telling it down to the village—of course those fools down there would laugh at us, just so long as they're four miles away. We don't intend to have them poking fun at us; probably that's why they haven't heard about it."

"Dill Chandler," said the lawyer forcibly, "I've known you since you were foreman of my grand jury, when I was county attorney. You've been ten years on the board of selectmen. You're a hard-headed, sensible old farmer. Do you actually mean to tell me you think there are ghosts on Little Clam Island?"

Chandler grew red. "I wouldn't 'a' believed it three

months ago," he returned. "But now—well, I don't know."

"So these things started about three months ago, did they?"

"About that, I should say."

"Curious," remarked the lawyer, as if talking to himself. "That's when I first began to hear from Tarbox & Tarbox, about wanting this land. I can understand how folks might try on some scheme like this to scare folks off, if they wanted to beat down the price of the land. But Gibbs is willing to give more ——" he broke sharp off, conscious he was letting out too much before Chandler, who was listening closely.

"Yes, that has occurred to me," put in the farmer, plainly referring to his companion's last speech. "But nobody around here wanted the land—so why should anybody try on a scheme like that? Besides, I'll admit that I've been over on the island a couple of times in the daytime. My hired man went with me. But there wasn't a sign of anybody having been upon the place, and I looked around pretty closely. After those trips I began to wonder myself."

"What do the folks around here think?" asked Ray. "I know 'em;—they've probably got some yarn started already."

"Well, you know those ruins on the south of the island are the remains of Gideon Badd's mansion;—

why, what's the matter?" Ray had started suddenly. "You've heard that old story—it was told in these parts when we were boys. It's true enough in part, too; there was a ship captain named Badd, and after he retired from sea he built a house on Little Clam Island. That was eighty years ago or more. The house burned—you can see the ruins to-day; my grandfather was a young man on this very farm, and I've heard him tell about that fire when I was a schoolboy. As old Badd disappeared it was thought he perished in the flames. But as to whether he was a pirate or not, I don't know what to believe. But I guess he had that reputation; I've heard folks speak of Gideon Badd's treasure years ago. I guess the story's forgotten now."

"I've heard it, years ago," said Ray. "I had utterly forgotten it. Well, some folks take stock in those foolish stories;—I don't. But now I'm here, I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. Row me over to the island, will you?"

Chandler hesitated. "Since you put it that way, I will," he said finally. "Of course I'm not afraid, at least in the daylight. In the night—well, Squire, you know I'm not a coward. But I swear, after what I've heard, money wouldn't hire me to go on that island after sunset."

Ray made no comment. He well knew Chandler's reputation for courage. As a young man, in the

woods, it was said he had killed a savage bear with nothing but a light axe. But many a man who fears nothing he can understand has quavered before the supernatural. Still, tough-fisted, hard-headed Dill Chandler, most practical man of a community which runs to practical things, was the last man the lawyer would have expected to find afraid of anything even remotely in the nature of a ghost. Yet Chandler had not been ashamed to confess he would give the island a wide berth by night. To tell the truth, Ray was considerably worked up; much more than he would have admitted. If Dill Chandler was a convert to a belief in spirits and their strange manifestations, then Skilayton Ray, though skeptical himself, knew that it was no trifling matter—this mystery of Little Clam Island, to be lightly laughed off.

Owl's Point, and Little Clam Island, a quarter of a mile from the peninsula across the cove, looked identically the same to Ray as when he had last visited the property, several years ago. Unless perhaps the ragged spruces, which covered both island and point, had grown a little larger; and perhaps there was a trifle more of underbrush. Chandler rowed across the cove in his big fishing-dory; all the coast farmers depend upon sea, as well as rocky land, to give them a comfortable living. When the bow grated upon the island's beach, both men jumped ashore. Little Clam Island was shaped very much like the shell-fish from

which it took its name, and was maybe half a mile long, and some half that in width. The "Little" was in distinction to Big Clam Island, three or more miles down the shore toward Sanoset. Upon all sides, except the south, a thick spruce growth covered everything;—except for a few small clearings where sparse grass grew, fit only for sheep to nibble upon. A horse or a cow would have starved to death upon the island, thought Ray; and his wonder at Gibbs' desire for the land grew each minute of his inspection. To the south, where there were no trees, a rocky hill swept steeply down to the sea. Upon the beach stood the ruins of a pier, that had been tumbling and shattered as long as Ray could recollect. And upon the very brow of the hill, exposed full to the southerly breezes, were the ruins of Captain Gideon Badd's mansion; burned more than three-quarters of a century before. It had been a veritable mansion—the extent of the old foundations showed it; and especially for that section, in a day when most of the coast dwellers lived in rude and small cottages. Now the crumbling piles of brick and stone were overgrown with bushes; flowers sparkled in the crevices; the winds of more than seventy-five stormy years had covered great portions of the old walls with drifting sand. There was no slightest sign to show that any man had set foot on the island for years; Ray remembered, and swore at himself for thinking of such a foolish thing, that

ghosts were said to leave no signs behind. There appeared to be no spot on the wind-swept island where even a camper could with any degree of comfort have laid his head; the spruce forest was swept by the winds; and upon the island there generally was a breeze from some direction, at any hour of the day or the night. Ray poked and peered, but he could see nothing to account for the nocturnal disturbances of which Chandler had spoken. He was not ready to accept a ghostly hypothesis as the explanation; but it certainly seemed clear that his first conclusion was erroneous; that is, that any man or men were responsible for the weird noises and strange sights. It would be impossible for such men to come and go from the island without being observed;—thus in that case they would have to remain upon the island, which would be impossible, with no camp or place of shelter. Clearly his first theory must be thrown aside; so the lawyer was completely at a loss now.

"Well, looked around enough?" asked Chandler. "Don't see any footprints in the sands, do ye?" He laughed heartily, and started down toward the boat. Ray followed slowly, hoping to the last that he might find something, the least bit of real evidence—in the sense of something of physical nature—that would tend to show that some trespasser had been upon the island. But the end of such search was as fruitless as the beginning. There was nothing that even in-

dicated that any human being had been upon Little Clam Island for many years. As they rowed back in the dory, he was struck with a new idea.

"I say, Chandler," he began. "If you don't mind, I'm going to invite myself to spend the day at your place. I've a wish to witness these ghostly manifestations myself, and to hear the weird noises. I suppose the program begins sharp at twilight."

The farmer stopped rowing, and grunted. He looked hard at Ray, in search of a possible trace of levity. But the lawyer was as grave as a very Sphinx. Chandler wiped his wet forehead with a handkerchief; it was hot work—rowing under the noonday sun.

"They'll begin soon enough—both noises and strange sights ——" he said finally. "You still think it's sort of a joke, perhaps. Well, ferret it out then; —you can't please the people along this stretch of shore any better."

News spreads quickly in isolated places; how, the city dweller, dependent upon his newspaper and telephone, often wonders. The shores of Sodom, as the lonely coast near Little Clam Island was called, are indeed thinly settled—the houses are far scattered, and the inhabitants are few. But by evening it had been bruited abroad that Squire Ray, from Sanoset, had come out to witness the strange things upon the property of which he was agent; and quite a little concourse had gathered in Dill Chandler's broad barn-

floor. That worthy himself put on his overcoat, coast nights are chill, and announced that he guessed he'd walk down to the shore himself. Then there was his hired man, a lanky down-easter of nasal drawl, and three other rustics from the vicinity. There were others in the little crowd at the barn, but only the bolder spirits passed down the lane and through the pasture bars—the others refused to go beyond the barn-yard fence. Mrs. Chandler, good woman, implored her husband to soon come back; for she did not dare to go to bed until he returned.

"I might be murdered in it," she exclaimed, not stopping to think that the ghosts she feared have never, so far as history relates, been known to commit the crime of murder. Tramps would be infinitely more dangerous in that respect. Yet Ray knew that good Mrs. Chandler possessed plenty of courage; she had spent many nights alone in the farmhouse, or with only young children, when her husband had been away, earning a living for his family in the lumber camps. And with no fear of wandering strangers, either; she felt capable of looking after herself. Now, under the spell of the supernatural, she was afraid. Skilayton Ray wondered mightily, even as the little group, keeping close together in the shadows, passed down to the lonely shore.

And the shore is lonely at night. The beach stretched far and desolate, down there by the silent

sea. A little breeze stirred through the marshland grasses. Over in the trees of the point, a night-bird called, lonesomely, to its mate. The sky was overcast; dark clouds hung thick over the horizon; here and there a little star winked faintly through from a black sky. The incoming tide lashed mournfully on the pebbles of the beach. The spell of the northland shore fell on the gathering—and nobody broke it by speech or even cough. Only the hired man puffed placidly on his pipe; it seemed good to see that hot coal shine, and die out, and shine again in the darkness.

Ray fell under influence of the spell with the rest. Perhaps even more so, for his nature was more sensitive and his imagination more vivid. Weird tales flooded his mind—stories of Poe, and Ambrose Bierce, and Irving's tale of Sleepy Hollow. These others had the advantage of him there; they had never read such stories; even the authors' names were meaningless to them. Their ghostly lore was little enough; only the few tales of a countryside — anecdotes which they sneered at skeptically by day, though perhaps they became a bit more real at night. These farmers, too, were more accustomed to the things of the country than was Ray, who lived indeed in a town, though Sanoset was no metropolis. So, when a lonesome cow mooed startlingly in a far corner of the pasture, he felt cold shivers chase up and down a spine that felt

like an icicle. But a legal training is good for jumping nerves, and Ray was coached against surprises. Thus he did not jump, but he noticed that more than one of the others did. And they had milked cows every morning and night of their lives since they were boys. Even the placid hired man took his pipe from his mouth. When, the next second, something rubbed against his legs in the darkness, he nearly dropped it; and his placid air slipped from him like a loose cloak, with his startled yell. But it was only Chandler's collie dog, who had followed them from his kennel behind the sheep-sheds. The others laughed, but only nervously; there was no merriment in the various chuckles. It was now so dark that it was impossible to distinguish between far sky-line and sea. Also the beach merged into the ocean without the dividing line to be seen. Little Clam Island lay like a dark blotch off from the shore, not a half mile from where they stood, but seeming, in the uncertain shadows, much farther away. Yet, to several of the little throng, it was all too near.

Then, out of the dark foreground, suddenly and startlingly, came a weird, long-drawn, mourning groan. It gathered volume apparently as it rose toward them over the dark waters. The Scotch collie gave one startled bark, thrust tail between her legs, and set briskly out for the kennel she had a short time since deserted. Ray felt the little hairs rise on the back of

his unshaven neck; then, as the moan was followed by a muffled bellowing, like the ghastly voice of some giant Banshee, he would have taken solemn oath that the very hairs on top of his head arose. They were such ghastly noises; how could it be the work of a human agency, even was there opportunity for one to be on that island? Ray felt himself sweating, even while his body grew cold. His companions were drawing closer together about him; even stout-hearted Chandler had grasped the lawyer's arm with a hand that shook perceptibly.

Then, suddenly a mysterious light appeared, flickering among the island trees. Ray could feel the others drawing away slowly; they were moving back from the shore into the pasture; even Chandler along with the rest. The lawyer alone remained upon the beach. While waiting for he knew not what, he had been nervous under the strain—his nerves had been drawn tense. But he was not a superstitious man; now that he had heard and seen for himself, he was too interested in the phenomenon to have any feeling of fear. He could not account for the strange lights—they were neither electrical or acetylene; and certainly not from kerosene or candles. Strive as he would, he could see no strange shapes; though very likely frightened, ignorant people might conjure up innumerable forms and figments from those peculiar flashes. His companions were now half-way up through the pasture; Ray turned

and followed them slowly. The hideous, ghastly noises, rising in mournful cadences, then sinking to low and sighing groans, continued. But the lawyer did not quicken his pace, as he followed the others, head bent in deep thought. He was pondering the problem, and finding no solution. It was useless to ask any one of these fellows to row off with him to-night, even if he cared to go himself, so totally unprepared. The natural thing was to suspect men, for some reason perpetrating a hoax. But it seemed impossible that men could come and go to the island, night after night, without being seen—yes, it was impossible. And there was absolutely no place out there where men could hide; Ray could not blame the country people for ascribing things to the supernatural.

CHAPTER XI

PROFESSOR GIBBS MAKES SOME THREATS

SKILAYTON RAY was at work in his office when his client, Chichester Somers, came in. It was early—the hands of the clock pointed to only half after eight. Millie Colleen had not yet reached the offices; and it was unusual for Ray to be there before nine. Somers took a chair, and waited for the older man to speak. Evidently he had come at this early hour of the morning by special appointment.

"I asked you down this early for a special reason," began Ray. "It is about some land of yours, or more correctly land in which you have a large undivided interest,—one-half, to be exact." The older lawyer was looking at some papers upon his desk as he spoke; thus he did not see Somers brace himself, nor notice the young man's quickened breathing. However, Somers said nothing, and Ray went on.

"This property is known as the Owl's Point land, and Little Clam Island. Owl's Point is a little peninsula that juts out into the ocean some four miles to the north of this town. The island lies near the point, separated from it by a small cove, perhaps a quarter of

a mile across. Your great-uncle owned the half of the land that I have spoken of, which of course descends to you. The other undivided half of the property belongs to other individuals—none of whom you ever heard of, probably; they are scattered about in different parts of the country, and are distant cousins of your late great-uncle.

"Frankly, I have never considered this property worth very much; unless to some wealthy person who wanted it for a summer place. Both point and island are rocky, and covered with bushes and spruce trees. The owners, except Captain Bridger, have been anxious to sell for years, at any reasonable price. For some reason your great-uncle chose to hold on to his part of the property, thus blocking a sale. I hold a power of attorney from the other heirs, authorizing me to sell at my discretion; but so far as your uncle, and now yourself, are concerned, I should have to get your consent. That is why I asked you to come here this morning. I have received an offer for a clear title to all this property of twenty thousand dollars. The party making the offer will pay five hundred down, to bind the deal; balance within thirty days, or whenever the deeds are handed over. He is coming at nine this morning for an answer to his proposition; which explains why I asked you to see me at half-past eight. I was away all day yesterday, and thus unable to see you then."

Various ideas were chasing each other through Somers' mind as he listened. Of course he knew, well enough, who the customer was that made the offer. It could only be Gibbs. He understood too why Gibbs was only ready to pay five hundred down. The Professor had not as yet seen Tarbox, Dick having eluded him successfully up to the present. Tarbox had written his broker, but it would be several days yet before he could hand Gibbs a check for twenty thousand. Evidently Gibbs had only a comparatively small sum of money at his disposal, but felt sure he could get into touch with Tarbox and obtain the twenty thousand supposed to be in that young man's possession within the time stated by Ray, or thirty days. Somers did not wish Ray to know that he had an idea as to whom the prospective purchaser might be, so he put the question.

"Who wants to buy the land, Mr. Ray?"

Ray seemed a bit troubled. He had rather hoped that Somers would not ask the question. That there was trouble of some nature between Mr. and Mrs. Somers and Professor Gibbs, the old attorney felt sure. However, the question was asked, and it required an answer.

"A gentleman named Gibbs; Professor Gibbs."

If Ray expected a manifestation of any sort from Somers, he must have been disappointed. The young lawyer's face was impassive.

"Why is it," he asked, in an even voice, "that if this land is worthless practically, as you have just said, Professor Gibbs is willing to pay such a large price for it?"

"Just what I'd like to know," was what Ray said to himself, though he did not put his thought into words. He merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I can merely tell you of his offer," he answered. "Mr. Gibbs has not confided in me as to his motives in buying this property. Perhaps he intends to build a summer home out there."

"I think I must ask for a little time to think things over," said Somers. "Of course ten thousand dollars —my half of what he offers—is rather a large sum to turn down, especially for property that may be worthless to me."

"If I am not mistaken, here is Gibbs now," said the lawyer. "Perhaps you do not care to meet him?"

Somers smiled. "Didn't look like it the other morning, did it? However, I have no objections to meeting him now. We have never been introduced, in fact."

Ray was genuinely puzzled now. Before he had a chance to say anything more, however, Professor Gibbs pushed open the door and entered. He was followed by his secretary.

Somers drew a long breath. If Gibbs and the other

had followed Miss DeForest to the boat in Boston, would not they recognize him as the girl's escort? But both of them stared at him as if they had never seen him before. Before the wondering Skilayton Ray could proceed with introductions, there was another interruption. The door opened, and Millie Colleen came beamingly in. And behind her was,—Somers' jaw dropped, and his gasp was distinctly audible. For Hildegarde DeForest, supposed by at least two in the room to be Mrs. Somers, stood in the doorway.

Gibbs was evidently startled, but he spoke pleasantly enough, while the secretary took off his cap.

"Why, how do you do, Hildegarde," said Gibbs. "This is rather a surprise. Or perhaps I should say Mrs. Chichester—from the purser's description of that lady, I judged it to be you." He looked over her shoulder, probably for a husband somewhere in the rear.

The girl said nothing. At first she became very white; then when Millie made a little exclamation, her cheeks flamed red. Helplessly she looked at Somers.

"Not delighted to see me, eh?" said the Professor, rather sneeringly. "Well, I'll relieve you of my unwelcome presence in a moment. I believe I have an appointment with you this morning, Squire Ray. Has your client decided to let me have the property we were speaking of?"

Ray was a good trial lawyer, cool-headed, and ac-

customed to surprises. But for once in his life he was decidedly nonplused.

"You can ask him," he said, pointing. "This is the gentleman. Mr. Somers, Professor Gibbs."

Gibbs bowed. The name of Somers was new to him; so of course he had not grasped the situation. He was about to frame a question, when Millie Colleen burst out impetuously, "Mrs. Chichester, he says. Why, you are Mrs. Somers, aren't you?"

Gibbs whirled on his heel like a shot. Ray scowled at his too impulsive ward. Somers sat down weakly in the nearest chair. Miss DeForest maintained her composure to a greater degree than the rest.

"Why, of course I am Mrs. Somers," she said, smiling upon the girl. "Professor Gibbs has made some mistake, evidently. I would introduce my husband, Professor, only Squire Ray has just done so."

"These are the very people I warned you against," cried Gibbs, turning quickly to Ray. "Mr. and Mrs. Chichester they called themselves when they left Boston together—I am positive of it. Now they appear under another name. That shows something out of the way, on the face of it. They are impostors, sir, as I told you. Any offers they make for the property I suspect they are interested in will not be worth that." He snapped his big fingers contemptuously.

"You have forgotten what I just told you, Mr. Gibbs," said Ray softly. "Mr. Somers is the largest

owner of the property you are referring to. There is no need for him to make an offer for what belongs to him already."

The big man pulled his red beard violently for a minute. Evidently he was chagrined. Then he burst out again.

"Yes, I had forgotten that. But, by Heavens, there is something distinctly wrong here. You can see that yourself, Ray. If he is Somers, why did he call himself Chichester? There would have been no need of it, if everything was all right. I don't pretend to understand the situation, but by God I will, before I get through with things. I'll rake to the very bottom. But I'm sure of one thing; this young woman here isn't married to that man,—Chichester, or Somers, or whatever his name is. She is a misguided young girl, sir, who has let her dislike of me lead her into the path of the criminal. For, if she isn't married, she has taken ——"

"Look out, sir," warned the secretary, catching the angry man by the arm. "You are speaking too freely now."

Gibbs choked in his rage, but plainly he recognized the fact to be true. His secretary had stopped him from telling more than he should.

"She has made herself liable to a criminal charge," he went on, but more quietly. "And quite likely the young man there will be implicated. However, if she

is willing to listen to reason, and turn over that which she has no right to, I will drop the charge."

Somers had been struggling to speak, but the woman held him back. Now Ray broke in.

"You are making rather serious accusations, sir," he told Gibbs. "Just what relation does this woman bear to you, sir?"

"None, at present. I happen to be engaged to her mother, however."

"And because of that fact, have attempted to coerce me," cried Hildegarde. "Even to the extent of attempting to steal what is mine. But you shall never get the ——"

Here Somers burst in. He realized that in her excitement the girl might possibly admit something which would injure her cause.

"Professor Gibbs," he said coldly. "Better not say any more. You have gone too far already, in accusing her as you have, when you say she is not married to me. Now you talk of criminal charges. You must be crazy, sir. Of course you can hardly expect to deal with me after this, in land or in anything else."

"Damn the land," roared Gibbs. "And don't try to bluff me, young man, either. I know what I can prove, and what I can do. If you don't believe me, look at your so-called wife there; she knows what I can do; and by God, she knows me well enough to feel sure I'll do what I set out, too. I'm going to telegraph

Boston now; before night I'll make it damned hot for both of you. Just look at her—that's all the proof I want that I'm speaking the truth."

For the girl had crumpled down into a heap on the floor, her cheeks the color of chalk. Her forced composure was gone; and now her limbs failed utterly to support her. And her eyes were frightened, too, as Somers seized her in his arms and looked into her face.

"He speaks truly," she whispered,—the words meant alone for his ears. "I'm not your wife, and he can have me arrested if he wishes." She shivered in his arms like a frightened little child.

"Don't worry, little girl," he whispered. "If it comes to that, there's a way out, you know." But apparently she did not understand him.

"I think I'll have to ask you to leave my offices, Mr. Gibbs," said Ray in his emotionless voice. "Mr. Somers is my client, and the grand-nephew of a valued old friend, of whose estate I am the executor. I shall expect Mr. Somers to explain the situation to me, naturally, at the proper time; but I do not care to listen to any more accusations from you, sir, against him or against the young lady he has introduced to me as his wife. And I shall do whatever may lie in my power to protect their interests, so long as I can honorably."

"Naturally," sneered Gibbs. "Maybe you're in with the gang, too. What the devil do you think I care

for a damned country lawyer, anyway? I'll employ the best counsel in New England, if necessary. And I think I'll look after this Tarbox chap, too; maybe he's in with the rest of you."

Ray had stepped out from behind his desk. He was very pale, and his eyes gleamed like points of fire. His fingers clutched and worked nervously.

"I'll give you just ten seconds to get through that door," he fairly snarled, beside himself with anger at the other's insults. "You foul-mouthed, hulking browbeater. Get out, and be devilish quick about it, too."

Gibbs looked down at the little, portly lawyer with a sneering, savage smile. Plainly he did not intend to leave. But his secretary showed better judgment.

"Come on, Professor," he put in. "We're only wasting time here. After all, this is the man's own office." And he fairly dragged his employer out into the corridor. Ray jumped after them, and slammed the heavy door in their very faces. Then he retreated to his office-chair, and sat down panting.

"That's the first time I've ever been insulted in my own office," he said, still hot and excited. "But, Somers, you've got to square yourself with me before I can work for you. That fellow may be a damned blackguard—ten to one he is, but he seems to speak with conviction, and as if he had the goods on you."

"This is no time to explain," snapped Somers.

"We've got to look after Hildegarde now. She's as faint as a rag; get some water, one of you, quick."

"I'll look after her," said Millie. She pushed Somers aside, and put one arm about the other woman's shoulders. "Come with me, dear," she said gently, and led her into the adjoining office, where a couch was pushed into an alcove of the wall. The young man saw that Miss DeForest was in good hands. He closed the door softly, and stepped over to Ray.

"I'm putting my cards on the table," he began. "Perhaps that girl has done wrong; there are a lot of things about this matter I don't understand yet. But I can tell you one thing—I shall stick by her; damn Gibbs and his talk of criminal charges. And I'll bet that you help me, after you've listened a minute. No, she's not my wife. But just listen."

In a few crisp sentences he outlined the facts for the older attorney. Ray listened attentively. As Somers finished, the old lawyer brought his clenched fist down among scattering papers with a mighty crash.

"It's a blind trail, but I'll take a chance on it with you," he exclaimed. "I like the girl's looks—and I don't believe she'd wrong a soul. That red-whiskered son-of-a-sea-cook may have the law on his side, but I'll bet that justice is with the girl. However, we've got to look out for the law, my boy, and let justice go hang. She generally swings around on the right

side in the end, does the same old goddess, with her scales tipping just about right. Of course where we don't know all the facts neither of us is qualified to give a first-class opinion. But it's easy enough to swing around this marriage difficulty."

"I've thought of that; or at least I began to think about it, when that beast, Gibbs, got after the girl. But hang it; it seems a shame to have to do that. And maybe she won't consent."

"It's better than going to prison," returned Ray. "Which usually happens, if one is convicted on a criminal charge. I reckon she won't object. And you don't mean you're ashamed to have a girl like that one."

"Good Lord, no. But she hasn't known me a week. Of course 'twould be only a matter of business, to save her trouble. She could have her freedom when she chose, after we've pulled her through this scrape."

Ray shrugged his shoulders, but made no comment. Unless one could read the thoughts behind those wise, kind eyes.

"I see nothing else," said Somers, rather desperately. "How about the law in the case?"

"That's all right. You're both from outside the state. The law requires residents to file their intentions of marriage with the town clerk, at least five days before license issues. But non-residents don't have to wait that five days. You can be married five

minutes after you've filed your intentions almost. And the town clerk's office is just along the corridor."

"But we can't have any publicity. If I go to some minister things may leak out."

"Don't have to go to any minister." Ray leaned back in his chair, thumbs in his coat lapels. "Ain't I a justice-of-the-peace? Give me a chance to kiss the bride."

"Hang it," exclaimed Somers, jumping up and pacing the floor. "We're discussing this just the way we might talk about selling a horse. It doesn't seem right;—of course there's no sentiment here anyway, but it sounds so confoundedly cold-blooded. And what will Miss DeForest think of the thing?"

"Don't know," said Ray cheerfully. "I'm not authorized to speak for her, you know. You'll have to ask her yourself, John Alden. Great old poet—Longfellow, or was it Whittier who wrote that piece? Well, anyway, this ought to be less embarrassing for you—seeing it's a plain matter of business." The Squire closed one eye—it was as if he were attempting to wink at himself. "Go in and find out. She must be feeling better now. And send Millie to me. I want her to write some letters."

Somers was decidedly nervous after he had gone into the other room and Miss Colleen had left them. Hildegarde was lying upon the couch. She had been crying; her cheeks were still wet, though she had used

her handkerchief valiantly after Somers stepped into the room. He went straight to his point—without trying to beat about the bush.

"I'm sorrier than I can say, Miss DeForest. I'd like to have that fellow Gibbs by the throat—no matter what the brute's size. But please don't worry. Skilayton Ray's going to help us, and he's a wonder, really. Do you know, they say he's the best trial lawyer in this part of the state? I've just told him some things—all I could from what I know myself, and he's with us to the death. And, er, well—about this marriage business of ours. Of course you knew, when you thought it over, just as I did, that we couldn't bluff things through very long after we ran into Gibbs. He's too sharp an antagonist. And as I understand it, he has some claim on the books, through your mother or something, if you're not really married. And if you're not, and won't turn the volumes over, he'll try to have you arrested for stealing them. But we can block that game and save you any trouble. By being, well, really and truly married, you know." He did not dare to look at her toward the last, so he kept his eyes upon the window—but he saw nothing of the dusty street outside. He knew, though, that the girl sat up, bolt upright and very quickly.

"Oh," she exclaimed, in a startled tone. "Oh," once again and she stopped short for an instant. Then she burst into rapid, impetuous speech.

"I thank you for thinking of me. But I couldn't let you do that, even if I knew you better. I was mad to ask you to come with me in the first place, and pretend—oh, you know. It was fate, or at least a striking coincidence, that you had to come to Sanoset anyway. I might have taken you from important business, for all I knew, when I asked you that day. But now,—I can't let you sacrifice yourself like this, no matter how much I am in trouble."

"It's no sacrifice," protested Somers. "Any man would do it for a girl in—in your present trouble. It's just mere business, you know. After the necessity for the thing is over I'll give you your freedom, of course; that is you can get a quiet divorce somewhere."

Still he did not look at her. But when she spoke again, he felt the new note in her voice.

"Oh, well, of course. I mean, putting it on a purely business basis perhaps;—well, it is different. I hadn't thought of it in—er—well, in just that way. Of course you could be freed all right when you wanted; rather I mean when the—the business arrangements permitted. You're a lawyer—you know about that part of it."

"Yes, yes," he assured her, hastily.

Her voice was entirely changed now—it was crisp, and entirely that of the woman of business.

"Well, in that case, on a purely business basis, I

consent. And I think it's very good, and very kind of you, to help me out in this way."

"Don't mention it," cried Somers. "I'll trot after a license. The clerk's office is in this very building. And, well, I suppose we'd better finish the—er—business right away, hadn't we? Mr. Ray can marry us, you know."

The social column speaks tritely of "quiet weddings." This was a quiet wedding with a vengeance. Skilayton Ray performed the ceremony, his glasses slipping down upon his nose while he followed his lines in the "Civil Officer," in which is found the civil marriage service, with an ink-stained forefinger. Millie Colleen, not understanding the situation in the slightest, but sworn to secrecy, made a nervous and staring witness. The lawyer read the lines out very solemnly, and the two—entering into their matter of business—made the brief responses necessary in just as solemn fashion. It may have been a fancy, but the sacred solemnity of the sacrament seemed to descend for the time upon that dusty suite of legal offices, though the adjuncts of a conventional wedding most certainly were not there. And a gold band that had been Somers' father's made an acceptable ring, even though it slipped loosely about on the girl's slender finger. There were no congratulations from either magistrate or witness.

"Well, there's the first step in the battle," said Ray,

to Somers in a low tone. "To change the subject, I guess my land deal's fallen through. You may never earn ten thousand that easy again."

"No," answered Somers. "But at least we'll see what Gibbs, or my wife, want with the property anyway now."

Ray's face was a study. "By George, I clear forgot to tell you."

"Forgot to tell me what?"

"Why, nothing very much. Your island's haunted, that's all."

CHAPTER XII

THE CIPHER IN BADD'S BOOKS

In the long library of Mr. Ray's house several persons were gathered about the table. It was evening, and the window curtains were tightly drawn, in fact, so tightly that an observer might have thought the occupants of the room feared eavesdroppers overmuch. Skilayton Ray was present, of course, seated at the head of his table; near to his hand was set the green-shaded study-lamp that alone illumined the large room. Near him sat Somers, with Hildegarde just across the table. Millie Colleen sat just within the little circle of light cast by the lamp. And back in the shadows, almost hidden from sight, sat a young man who was observing—that is for him—a remarkable silence. It was none other than rattle-brained but jovial Dickie Tarbox.

These five had met together for counsel and consultation. Perhaps instead of calling it only a council, conspiracy would have been the better word. A council is truly an assembly of persons gathered together for deliberation and advice; in a conspiracy the said delib-

erations and consultations are expressly for the purpose of planning some act against existing law. Not that these five were lawbreakers in anything but a technical sense. But to hide away a fugitive from justice, for whom the sheriff is at the moment looking, is surely a violation of law, if not of justice. And Gibbs had that afternoon sworn out a warrant for Tarbox, alleging that unfortunate young man to be an absconder and an embezzler. Further, it was more than possible that the five had no strict legal right to the several old and tattered volumes upon the library table. True, Somers and Miss DeForest were now one in the eyes of the law, but this was the evening of their wedding-day. And she had not been married when she met Somers on Boston Common with the first five of old Quarnoton's volumes packed away in her dress-suit case. And it was evidently upon that point of marriage—Hildegarde DeForest's marriage—that the question of ownership of these volumes turned.

Somers had laughed when Skilayton Ray first told him of the mysterious sights and sounds on Little Clam Island.

"Some scheme of Professor Gibbs' to keep prying people away from the island, of course," he had said.

The old lawyer looked doubtful. "Well, perhaps. I confess I suspected the same thing at first. But now I don't know what to think. Of course, I don't believe in ghosts; that is, in broad daylight, and miles away

from where these manifestations take place. But if you had been there with me the other night ——" and he stopped.

"You surely don't mean that you believe in ghosts now?"

"Not exactly. But I tell you, this is a queer thing. I've been all over that little island, and it's bare as a rock, except for a few trees that conceal nothing. Not so much as a chance for a rat to hide. And if human beings are responsible, they'd have to get out to that island by boats, wouldn't they? Seeing they couldn't be concealed anywhere on the island. Well, I can show you a dozen people out that way who have watched Little Clam Island pretty closely of late. The community out there is all stirred up about the thing. And they swear no boat could possibly approach the island without being seen."

Somers had looked grave himself then. "Well," he said, striving to laugh, "it only means another complication. We'll have to take it in its turn. Now we must work out Gideon Badd's cipher, if we can." Which was the main purpose of the little gathering in Skilayton Ray's library that evening.

There were no explanations regarding the books from any person. Tarbox had been taken into the secret, which seemed advisable under all the circumstances. But Hildegarde had not said how the books came to her hands, nor had she been asked. Somers

had put his scraps of knowledge together and thought he had a fair idea now of the facts, but of definite information even he had none. And Millie Colleen did not know how Volumes Six and Seven had come to be in the little black trunk, which she had for years, in a vague way, known to be her property. Doubtless Skilayton Ray could have told about that trunk which had come to Sanoset with the little girl he had brought home so many years ago. But his lips were firmly closed upon the subject, though his eyes had lit up, perhaps with interest, when he learned where Millie had discovered the two old volumes. All he would say was, "Well, it seems plain enough that you have some rights in the two books. They were left with McLaughlin, as his own handwriting testifies, for Mrs. Somers' father and Somers' great-uncle. I never saw the books before, and don't know the circumstances. But Millie may be entitled to the reward; she certainly discovered them for you." How they could have come into her old black trunk he did not say; and perhaps he did not know.

Gideon Badd, or so tradition had it, had been a pirate, a scourge and terror of the seas. So much for tradition. Actual history spoke of the man as a hard old shipmaster in a day when his calling bred granite-like men. One would not think such a man would have found either time or inclination, in his busy, stirring, eventful life, for reading, especially the reading

of ponderous books of doubtful science. But evidently Badd had thumbed his books to considerable extent, perhaps down in some ancient ship's cabin, under the murky gleam from a vessel's lantern, in the long, tossing watches of nights at sea. There was no question but that the books had once been Badd's property. In illiterate scrawl of ink that had dried before the fathers of these young people, at least, had been born, the old sailor had painfully traced his name on the yellowed fly-leaf of each volume:—"Gideon Badd, His Book."

The cipher (if it was a cipher) started in Volume One. "See the Book," were the first words, in Badd's cramped writing. "The Olde Book." Then came a few scraps, apparently irrelevant. An old adage first: "A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss—verry True." Then a few lines from some old ballad of sailor men: "For Itts Off Boys Off, to the Spanish Main Again." Under all this was a jumble of figures, as if some small boy had attempted to do a few simple problems. The spelling was poor and the mathematical calculations showed several mistakes. Most plainly Badd had been a man of little education.

"Not very much here," was Ray's dry comment. They turned to the next volume. Hildegarde DeForest began to write upon a sheet of paper at her elbow.

The fly-leaf of Book Two bore a brief paragraph at its top.

"May 5th. Tooday my Cabinn boy, Cleaning Out, Knocked Books 8—9—10 whitch was on the end of the Shelf, threw a Port-Hole into the Oshun. He will nott Be so Careless Again."

They all smiled grimly. Doubtless the cabin-boy had been sorry for his carelessness.

"Old Badd evidently thought a deal of his books," said Somers. "Very likely Quarnoton's Works made up the man's whole library."

Near the bottom of the page was written: "The Treasure is Book Fifth—Thirtyfour six third." Underneath in lighter ink: "Fifty Hogsheads Rumm whitch I Sold Tooday in Boston was Pronounced Extra Good. Iff They knowed whare itt come From."

Volume Three's fly-leaf was scrawled with meaningless scraps and names; perhaps of long-dead members of Badd's old crew. In heavy ink, at the bottom of this page, appeared the words: "On Littel Clam Ileand, In the Secret Book 1 twentythree nine seventh."

Volume Four's fly-leaf read: "Behind the Sink. Look Under the Pipes From the First Book, twenty-one twentyfive eight nine ten."

In Volume Five the scrawl continued: "And Turn Towards the Frunt of the Second Book ten six sixth."

Volume Six went on in the faded scrawl: "But not so Farr as the First Book thirtyseven twentyfour tenth."

While Volume Seventh read: "Thare you will Find

Ttt. Iff you can Read Book 1 Five one First." Underneath this the scrawl ended: "To my mate, Rowl Bridgerr, Who turned Chicken-Harted. With My Compliments. Gideon Badd, Esquire." And under this, in very small letters: "You've Gott Religion. Itt may Shift the Curse." There was nothing else written on the fly-leaves.

Somers looked up in astonishment at the ring of perplexed faces.

"To my mate, Rowl Bridger, it says. Why, that's impossible. Badd must have died years before my great-uncle was born."

Ray smiled. "Certainly. But Rowland was a common name in the Bridger family. This Rowland Bridger that Badd refers to is probably your uncle's grandfather. His name was Rowland Bridger, too, and he was a seafaring man, highly respected in his day. Though I never heard that he sailed with Gideon Badd."

"Probably he didn't for long," put in Tarbox, who was leaning half over the table in his interest. "Badd writes that he turned chicken-hearted, doesn't he? Probably Bridger couldn't stand for all of old Badd's actions."

"There may be a cipher here," said Somers. "I can understand his putting it into the different volumes in this way, too, so that any one would have to possess all the books before having the thing in full. If the

other books in the series hadn't been knocked overboard by that unlucky devil of a careless cabin-boy, he'd have probably had parts of the cipher in them also. But it looks mighty blind to me; what part on these fly-leaves is cipher and what isn't?"

"I think I can help out there," said his wife. "Father has often shown me the first five books and told me what he thought about it. And I have just taken down the essential parts, as they seem to me, upon this piece of paper." She pushed the sheet out upon the table. Ray read it slowly while the others looked over his shoulder.

> "See the Book. The Olde Book. The Treasure is Book Fifth — Thirtyfour six third. On Littel Clam Ileand, In the Secret Book 1 twentythree nine seventh. Behind the Sink. Look under the Pipes From the First Book, twentyone twentyfive eight nine ten. And Turn Towards the Frunt of the Second Book ten six sixth. But not so Farr as the First Book thirtyseven twentyfour tenth. Thare you will Find Itt. Iff you can Read Book 1 Five one First."

"Hm," said Ray, after reading the sheet. "It seems to be a cipher within a cipher. Evidently it can be translated by referring to these various books of the series which he mentions here."

"No," answered Hildegarde, "I think not. Father and I often tried it, but could never make any sense.

This seems to refer to certain of his seven books. Of course, we only had the first five; but father told me six and seven had been left in a bank in Maine with its president, this Mr. McLaughlin, for certain reasons. You will notice this cipher refers only to Volumes Five, Two and One. Now that we have Books Six and Seven, we can see that the part of the cipher written in them only refers to Book One also. But the numbers given do not correspond to any chapters or pages in the volumes—I have tried it. It makes no possible sense. Then, also, you will notice that this cipher refers to some other book—called the old book. Also to some book which he calls the secret book. There is some key to this cipher, I firmly believe,—but what it is or where it may be found I do not know. Otherwise, of course, it makes no sense. You can deduct nothing from 'Look under the Pipes From the First Book.' Books don't have pipes. And the key certainly seems to be somewhere in these musty old volumes. And I believe it points to treasure on Little Clam Island. Father thought so. Captain Bridger thought so. Professor Gibbs thinks so; he has been fairly wild to go in search of it since mother told him of the books and the cipher. The books were not to become my property, by a provision of father's will, until after I was married, if that should ever take place. Before that they were in mother's custody, and she had charge of them. And that is why, I suppose,

the Professor was willing to pay such a large price for the land."

"What makes you so sure there is a treasure?" asked Ray, in his best cross-examining style and looking at Mrs. Somers shrewdly.

"From papers in my father's possession. Mother has them; unless she let Professor Gibbs take them. Father traced down the old traditions quite carefully; he became convinced that Badd had concealed a treasure somewhere, and presumably on Little Clam Island."

"Yes; Editor Hunkus backs up those stories," exclaimed Somers. "He told us some of the traditions about Badd the day we inserted the advertisement for Volumes Six and Seven of Quarnoton's Scientific Works."

Ray had been examining the cipher again. He laid it down now with a troubled air.

"I don't see that we are much of anywhere. I certainly can't make head nor tail of this cipher business. And you say your father could never decipher it. By the way, why didn't he and Captain Bridger make a search for this treasure?"

"There were several reasons. I may as well tell all I know, even though it doesn't help much. Captain Bridger was a descendant of the man to whom Badd originally sent these volumes containing his cipher. You remember the inscription in Volume Seven. Cap-

tain Bridger, Chick's great-uncle, was a man of very high standards,—I have heard my father say so."

"I can testify to that," put in Squire Ray.

"Yes. And he thought it was wrong for him to have any part in hunting for a treasure, or in profiting by one, which his ancestor had had a part in obtaining as a pirate. For it seems that the original Rowland Bridger had been for a time Badd's mate. Evidently he reformed and left the pirate's crew,—you know old Gideon Badd writes that he turned chicken-hearted. The original Bridger must have known of the treasure, whether he could read Badd's cipher or not. Badd may have written it especially for him when he sent him the books. Anyway, Bridger apparently never made any attempt to discover the treasure. Perhaps he thought a curse was upon it,—Badd evidently did. But he did buy Badd's real estate, which was put up at auction after the fire that destroyed the old pirate's mansion, and in which it is supposed he was burned to death. And the property belongs to the Bridger heirs to-day because of that purchase."

She paused and glanced about at the others; they all seemed deeply interested.

"Captain Rowland Bridger, the last one, knew of these books. Their story had been handed down in his family. But, feeling as he did, he never made an effort either to solve the secret of this cipher or to find the treasure. Instead, he even sent the books away, along

with a lot of other old manuscripts, to be sold. By some accident he overlooked Volumes Six and Seven. Father happened to be in this vicinity, doing some work for a great granite concern. My father was not only a geologist, he was a student along many lines. He was especially interested in old books, and, while poking about in an old bookstore in Crawtown, he ran on to these volumes and purchased them, and became interested in the cipher, and also in the stories of Gideon Badd that were told him when he began to make inquiries. He found out that Captain Bridger had sold the books to the old store, and he made a point of visiting Mr. Bridger in search of information. It was then he found out Bridger owned the largest part of Little Clam Island; also he learned of Volumes Six and Seven. Bridger gave him information, but utterly refused either to sell the land or to engage in a treasure hunt. However, after my father had done him some sort of favor, I don't know what, they made a compromise. Bridger would not sell the other two volumes containing the cipher's end outright. But he agreed to leave them with some third person,—and at the expiration of a certain period, if my father was still so minded, to allow him to search for the treasure, provided he could solve the cipher. I think, as did father, that Captain Bridger was a little bit superstitious about the whole matter,—afraid of some curse such as the old pirate, Gideon Badd, had written of.

For when the bank failed and McLaughlin disappeared, he absolutely refused to have anything more to do with the matter, or to allow father, either. The volumes left with McLaughlin had gone anyway, so the whole matter was dropped. But I think father never gave up the idea of some day looking for Badd's hidden treasure; not up until the time he disappeared ——" She stopped, plainly overcome by her emotions.

"A strange story," said Somers. "And I respect my great-uncle for his high standards of conduct. But I have no scruples about searching for this treasure. What if some old ancestor helped steal it? I can't help that. The original owners are gone, and the treasure does no good to any one hidden away. Nobody has any claim on it unless it is we. I'm with Miss—er—rather with my wife, in her search. I was willing to help in the first place, and I am now, and more so."

"But you don't know the cipher," objected Ray.

"Hang the cipher. We'll dig up the whole island, if necessary. All of us are in on it; we'll form the Little Clam Island Treasure-hunting Syndicate, Inc. I only specify that my wife and I retain controlling interest, because she has the books and I the land. You're in with us, aren't you, Ray?"

The old lawyer smiled at the boyish show of enthusiasm. But his eyes were bright. Already the lure of

treasure-hunting had enveloped him, even every one who becomes even remotely conn the mystery of hidden treasure. It is the spirit, the lure of chance, of wealth obtained ways and in quick time. That gambling spi every man's blood, be there so much as on puscle in it. The fever had gripped old S even as it did Somers, and Hildegarde, and lie Colleen, and happy-go-lucky Dick Tar eyes of all around the old table were spark had already commenced to see visions and dreams.

"But we mustn't forget Gibbs," said the S denly. Tarbox winced at the name. "Th still in on this fight—and he'll make trouble We must watch out for him."

"Damn Gibbs," exploded Somers. "We books—now let's see him get them. Pos often more than nine points of the law. arresting my wife on the charge of steal well, we're married now, and I guess he'l miscued there if he tries that stunt."

"Let's not be too sanguine," warned Ra that your wife, or Tarbox here, either, m Things will come out all right. But it battle."

"Well, we're ready," sang out Somers. in exuberant spirits to-night. "Let the

come on. And we'll see who wins out in the end."

"All right. But, remember, we must be careful in looking for that treasure and not arouse the suspicions of the country people. Better give it out that you're building a summer camp on the island. Too, I forgot again." The Squire's jaw dropped. "Mysterious things are happening on that island."

"Bosh. Some of Gibbs' tricks. We'll soon stop that."

Ray shook his head. He was not ready yet to confess to a belief in the supernatural. But he felt very sure that neither Gibbs, or any other man, had a hand in the disturbances on Little Clam Island.

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXCITING NIGHT

DILL CHANDLER and the other denizens of the shores of Sodom, the name so graphically applying to that lonely coast by the sea off which lay Little Clam Island, shook their heads when they heard that Chichester Somers, largest owner of that property, was to build a summer cottage upon his island. But the young man, when he drove out with his attorney, Skilayton Ray, for a first look at the site of the new bungalow, only laughed at the stories told him of sights and sounds attributable to nothing unless supernatural causes.

"If the ghosts can stand the noise of our camping party they have my respect," he assured everybody, with a twinkle. What use to argue with a man who took everything as a joke? But as Mrs. Chandler put the common thought into words: "Such levity was plain unseemly. And young Mr. Somers will be sorry he ever put foot on that island, mark my words."

There was more comment, too, when it was learned that the young man would employ no carpenters in his building, intending to do the work himself, with what assistance his friends could give him. Somers explained that with his usual laugh.

"This isn't going to be a mansion; only a plain fishing camp. My wife and I can do the work—it's part of the lark. And I've a young fellow visiting me who will help." Tarbox's name was not mentioned; until he could recompense Gibbs, that young man must remain out of sight. And Little Clam Island was as good a place for that as anywhere else.

Skilayton Ray, perforce, must remain in his offices during the day; for he could not put aside the duties of his practice for an uncertain treasure hunt, no matter how fascinating. But he could come out in the evenings, bringing Millie along with him, and driving back in the early morning. His housekeeper was rather shocked at the arrangement, for she could not understand what pleasure a man of Mr. Ray's age and dignity would find in a camping excursion, though, naturally, Millie might enjoy it. Of course, the good woman did not know the lure that called to old and young alike.

Thus the second evening after the unsuccessful attempt at solving the cipher found the little party gathered about a driftwood fire that leaped and gleamed upon the sloping beach, a little below the ruins of Gideon Badd's old mansion. Two white tents were pitched near the edge of the spruces, set up near a pile of lumber that had been scowed across that morning for the bungalow.

"I suppose we must do something with that stuff,

Dickie," began Somers, as he filled his pipe after the first supper which they had eaten upon the shore, "just to keep up the bluff in case any visitors drop around. If they find out what we're really after all the ghosts in Christendom wouldn't be enough to keep people away."

Both girls started a little at his words and looked at each other just a trifle nervously. The sun had gone down plungingly into a bath of red fire and the soft twilight was gradually turning into a black night. To the three more used to the clamor of a great city, it seemed especially lonely upon this remote isle of the northern sea; and even to Ray and his ward, accustomed to the quiet atmosphere of a country town, Little Clam Island seemed unnaturally still as night drew in around their little bonfire.

The wood, still damp from the salty waters in which the pieces of timber had drifted so long, snapped and crackled in the warm blaze. Below, on the beach, the waves broke among the rocks and pebbles; and water upon the shore always has a chill sound at night. The air of gaiety so apparent before sunset gradually died away; there were fewer laughing remarks, and a silence of constraint fell upon the little company. Tarbox, arms about his knees, stared into the glowing embers beneath the burning logs, perhaps thinking that his little inheritance would be to him as ashes almost before these burning coals had crumbled and grown cold.

He had received a line from his broker, that twenty thousand dollars, the sum his securities had realized, would be to his credit in the Boston Trust Company on the morrow, and a fresh-blotted check, made out to the order of Professor Gibbs, was drying in his pocket, to be handed over to Ray in the morning. The old lawyer would hand it to Gibbs, and also see to it that any action commenced by that irate individual against Tarbox should be immediately withdrawn. Ray scowled at the smoke drifting up from his black cigar. Hildegarde leaned back against one great log, eyes closed, but not asleep. The firelight distinctly showed the little lines of worry between the eyes. Millie knitted—upon some tomfoolery of a sweater, such as girls spend too much time doing—(the expression was that of her uncle), but fitfully; plainly her interest was not in the work. Only Somers seemed to be in normal mood, as he smiled over his pipe, and very likely his smile was forced.

Then suddenly something brought them all up with a start. It was not much—just some low clink-clink, such as a spade or pickaxe might make—striking against some piece of iron. "Listen," snapped Ray, though there was no need of his ejaculation; they were all listening, and with straining ears. But the noise did not seem to be repeated.

"Wind," said Somers. "We're getting nervous, aren't we, and over nothing?" They all laughed, but

it was not a prolonged laugh, nor one entirely free from strain. The wind had indeed risen as night's curtain shut out all surroundings from sight, and it soughed through the spruces back on the hill, in lonesome accompaniment to the tide on the sands. But each one felt that the clanking noise, whatever else it might be, was not caused by the night breeze. However, there was nothing else to do but settle back around the fire again, unless one preferred to go to bed, up there in the tents that gleamed a cold white against the background of night-painted trees. And it was from somewhere in that direction that the noise had seemed to come. Maybe Gideon Badd, aroused from his long sleep by the disturbing steps of intruders, had broken out from that tomb which the ruins of his great mansion made for him, that he might peer down through the night to see what manner of men they could be.

"Throw on another log," said Tarbox, shivering. "Dashed cold nights you get down on the coast—even in summer." He drew his coat closer about him as a new, green log sizzled into its bed amid a shower of wind-blown sparks.

The silence now seemed to tighten about them even more than before. The sounds of wind and sea, now grown familiar, were not so noticeable,—as we do not notice the ticking of a clock, even in a quiet room, because we are so accustomed to it. Thus we become

insensible to common noises. It is the sound out of the ordinary that brings us up with a start,—all goose-flesh maybe, if it is night, when one's nerves are apt to be susceptible—that, or the sudden stopping, too, of the familiar sound. Thus a weird sensation may sweep over us when the clock stops, or the wind ceases to blow for a moment during a storm.

"I'm going to bed," said Ray suddenly, getting up from his seat and flinging his cigar into the ashes. It was the signal for them all to rise. By the flickering light of the fire, throwing all sorts of moving and distorted shadows over the slippery grass of the hillside, they toiled upwards to the two white tents. The larger was for the men, the other the two girls would occupy. A dim-burning lantern, hanging from each tent's ridge-pole, furnished scarcely more than necessary light. Good-nights were brief and quickly said. Tarbox, on his roll of blankets (laid over spruce boughs), rolled a bedtime cigarette, and gloomily watched the other two prepare for sleep. From the adjoining tent could be heard the low voices of the girls; presently their lantern was turned out. Ray and Somers were already between their blankets; presently Tarbox, having sufficiently filled his lungs with smoke, rolled into his fragrant bunk, first blowing out the swinging lantern. From where he lay, out through the blowing flap of the tent he could see the fire as it died upon the beach, an occasional leaping flame lighting up for a moment

the panorama of dark waves rolling restlessly in to meet the sand, and seaweed, and slippery rocks that made up the island's shore. As the fire died down, his eyelids grew heavier and heavier, until finally his eyes did not see the flickering light at all, for he was sound asleep.

He came up all standing, flinging his blankets into the face of Somers, who also had sprung up from his couch. A sort of groaning cry, as of some person in agony, was still ringing in his ears. Even as he bumped into Somers, while they both fumbled for the lantern, the cry was repeated,—an agonizing, agitating moan, that seemed to come from nowhere in particular, but to continue, rising and falling, but clearly to be heard, and continuously almost. It was a flesh-creeping cry, heard in that lonely place in the dead of night; a cry to make one's blood run colder; a curdling, shuddering noise. Tarbox could hear old Ray muttering to himself in the black shadows of his corner, while from the other tent came the shrieks of the frightened girls. Then Somers' fumbling fingers found the lantern, a match flared, and the lamp's wick burned up smokily. The three men looked at each other with white, astonished faces; they could hear the girls in the other tent hastily scrambling into clothes. Somers, holding the lantern in a hand that trembled slightly in his excitement, gave a forced laugh.

"The wind again," he exclaimed.

"Wind be hanged," cried Ray. "You never heard the wind make a noise like that. It's the same that I heard the other night when I was over on the other shore."

Somers' face darkened with passion. "Does that man Gibbs think he can frighten us with such nonsense?" he fairly screamed. "Come on, Dick, let's look into this." He dashed from the tent with the lantern, Tarbox following. Ray would have made the third one up over the slope and into the spruces; for he was only startled, not afraid. But a rush from the other tent prevented him; the two girls were clinging to him in the darkness.

"Hold on here," he sputtered, shaking them off. "Let's get a light on. It's darker than a hidden pocket out here." They could hear Somers and Tarbox crashing wildly about in the spruces above. The cries still continued, but they were dying slowly away, and presently only the rustling of a light breeze was audible. Ray had finally laid hands upon the lantern; its light gleamed upon the strained faces of Mrs. Somers and his ward. The women still looked frightened, and Ray was soothing them in a gruff way when the others came stamping back, kicking in the underbrush beneath their feet. They were both angry, as their faces plainly showed; but more, they seemed perplexed.

"Did you see anything?" asked Ray. Tarbox looked at his chum, then spoke cautiously.

"I wouldn't swear to it. How about you, Chick?"

"I thought I did. Something white, dodging in the bushes, when we first ran into the spruces. But there couldn't have been anything there—didn't we beat around all through them?"

"See how quiet it is now," said Ray. "The breeze makes hardly a sound. If there was a footstep anywhere on the island, or the splash of an oar, we could hear it."

"We'll go around the island, just the same," exclaimed Somers. "Of course, there's some explanation for this, and obviously it must be a natural one." He spoke with unusual force; perhaps because he noticed Ray shaking his head.

"If you go we'll all go," put in Miss Colleen. "I never heard such unearthly noises. Don't you dare go off and leave us here alone."

Eventually they all started, stumbling along over the stones and obstructions on the shore, by the dim light from the lanterns. However, now it was not so dark; not only were their eyes more used to the blackness, but a faint, gray light was gradually creeping up in the east. On one side the water stretched off into moving shadows; on the other the spruces frowned—majestically enough by night, though they seemed pitifully stunted, little trees by daylight. But had there been any boat upon the gently moving waters they must have seen it; neither was there anybody hiding in the

shadow of the trees. As they rounded the point on the far end of the island and started back along the shore facing the open ocean they were all puzzled enough. Then suddenly the moaning cries broke out again; they seemed this time to come from over the tents they had just deserted. Neither was it fancy, but a weird, inhuman shape which they saw, that seemed to waver and dance, and move in ghostly fashion above the ridge and through the intervening trees.

The men began to run forward toward that figure, which disappeared from sight as they ran. The flashes of peculiar light that had gleamed about the figure were gone also; suddenly, as if blotted out. The girls, more startled than ever but not daring to stay behind on the lonely beach, ran after the others as best they could. Once Hildegarde fell down, tripped headlong by an unseen log into the long dew-wet grass that edged the sands. They bumped into trees, whose branches seemed to stretch out tearingly at them, slapping their faces in cold, wet swishes. Ahead the three men ran, pursuing they knew not what by the light of two swinging lanterns. But the noises died mockingly away in front of them even as the flickering shape had disappeared. When they reached the stretch of ground where the tents had been pitched there was nothing except the wind to be heard. But there was plenty and enough to be seen. For one of the tents, that which the girls had occupied, was pulled violently

down and lay a piled-up heap of wet canvas over the things that were inside. The men's tent still stood, but the guy ropes were flapping loosely from their stakes; one pull would sweep it down also. The three men were profanely voicing their surprise—even as the girls came panting up.

"That's men's work for you," cried Somers. "I never heard of ghosts pulling down tents before."

"Where are your men then?" returned the Squire, who seemed considerably shaken. "That was no man skipping upon the ridge, if I saw anything at all—though I wouldn't take oath that I did. Did you see any men upon the island or any place where men could hide? And how could they get here at all without a boat, unless they flew?" He laughed sarcastically if shakily.

Somers made no answer. He stood looking at the fallen tent in perplexity. Tarbox was swearing softly to himself as he walked about. The girls looked on, clinging to each other.

"I won't sleep in that tent again to-night," finally put in Millie. Her tone was emphatic. "Can't we build up the fire on the shore? It must be nearly morning anyway."

"Three o'clock," said Tarbox. He shoved his watch back in its pocket and glanced curiously toward the east. The faint light there was considerably brighter. Soon faint shades of pink and slowly dark-

ening reds would adorn that horizon. Tarbox could not remember at the moment when he had ever before seen a sunrise.

So they spent the rest of the night about a fire, drowsing intermittingly. And Tarbox saw his sunrise. But it was a cross little company that began to think about breakfast. Also they were troubled and perplexed. Somers did not know what the others thought, nor did he ask. But he was satisfied there was an explanation for the mystery of Little Clam Island. And he made up his mind to find that explanation, no matter what the cost.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLUFF THAT WORKED

STATE SENATOR SMITHFIELD CARTON sat in his office reading a letter, one from the little heap of morning's mail. The page bore the heading of a well-known Boston bank, and the letter was from the manager of its bond department, who also was an intimate friend of Carton's as well as a business acquaintance. Thus the letter, though it dealt in the main with certain stock transactions in which the two were interested, was more informal in tone than the usual business letter. It was, however, when he turned to the letter's second sheet that Carton seemed to become tremendously interested as he glanced down through the paragraph.

> "Your friend, Digby Perley, was in my office the other day; a little matter connected with the Eastern Lumber Company bonds; we have handled the matter for Perley and his crowd. Crothers, of your local bank, and a man named Hodges are interested also. However, that is not what I wish to speak of; though, as a friendly tip, if you can pick up some of these bonds, better do so. They are gilt-edged, and these fellows must be

hard up for money, or they wouldn't unload. Perhaps they are planning some coup; it always looks suspicious when a gang like that turn all their holdings into ready money. In putting his papers into his bag he dropped one upon the floor which I picked up for him. It was one of the old stock certificates of the Allamoosook Company, which failed years ago; you remember it went under when the Crawtown Bank was wrecked. We handled their city end when I was breaking in as a clerk. It was like discovering some moss-covered grave-stone unexpectedly in a churchyard to run on to one of those old certificates. I wondered how Perley got hold of it, but I asked no questions, as he seemed rather annoyed to think I had seen it. Funny, wasn't it?"

Carton paid small attention to the rest of the letter, but he read and reread this paragraph several times. Finally he laid down the letter and began to drum upon the table-top with nervous fingers as he mused.

"It's the little things that do the business, eh? For want of a nail the shoe was lost, and all the rest. Now what the devil was Perley doing with that old Allamoosook stock certificate? McLaughlin was supposed to have cleaned out all that stuff. It looks rather fishy."

He did some rapid thinking in the next few minutes. Then a look of determination spread over his face. He sat down at the telephone and called a number.

"By gad, I'll try it," he exclaimed. "Perley always was a sneaking little cuss, and I'll bet he's a coward to boot. And I'll see what a bluff will do."

The telephone girl had made the connection, and he spoke into the instrument.

"Hulloa, this you, Hunkus? Carton speaking."……

"All alone over there?"……

"Joe, I want you to help me out on a little scheme. I can't explain over the wire, but if it works out, 'twill do a whole lot to clear up certain reputations. Do you understand?"……

"Yes. Then do this, right off. Call up Digby Perley and tell him you want him to come over to the *Banner* office. Tell him it's very important. Then hold him there, if you have to strangle him, until I come. And whatever I say, look wise, and back me up, even if you don't understand."……

"No, can't explain any more. Good-bye." He rang off.

Then Carton did what seemed a strange thing. He rummaged in a dusty filing-case and at length dug out two time-yellowed envelopes, thickly stuffed with papers, and bound with rubber bands. Apparently he knew what they contained, for he gave no more than a casual glance at the envelopes, which looked as if they might have reposed in the filing-case for at least a generation. He thrust them into his inside pocket,

snatched up hat and stick, and hurried out into the street, forgetting in his haste to shut his office door. A passing individual saluted him cordially, but Carton paid no more attention than if the man had been one of the elms that overarched the street. The fellow stared after Carton's well-groomed form as it disappeared around the corner.

"Must have something on his mind," he exclaimed. "Went by and never noticed me. I suppose some widow's back in her interest and he's hurrying to foreclose." Carton was known to be scrupulous in his dealings, but was reputed a man who expected the full sixteen ounces in his pound of flesh. "Hard as nails" was the expression more commonly used by the villagers.

In the little office of the *Banner* sat Digby Perley, listening with ill-concealed impatience to the red-headed editor, who was describing some pet scheme for Crawtown's civic betterment. He glanced up in evident relief as Carton opened the door and started to rise.

"Gad, Hunkus," he exclaimed petulantly, "I believe a Polander is a more natural politician than even an Irishman. I forget, you inherit the characteristics of both, don't you? Tell your public park scheme to Carton here; he's in politics, and maybe he's interested. I'm not. I've my own affairs to look after."

He started to go out, but Carton checked him. The

State Senator was standing well in front of the door, so that he barred the way. He motioned Perley back.

"Sit down, Perley," he snapped. "I'm here expressly to see you. I've wanted an interview with you ever since you came back from Boston the other day. Hunkus and I have both wanted to see you."

Hunkus nodded and looked wise as an old owl behind his spectacles. As a matter of fact, he had no idea what Carton was up to. All sorts of ideas whirled in the brain under the red thatch.

"Wanted to see me?" asked Perley, surprised. He looked at his watch. "Well, then, you'll have to talk fast. I've an appointment in five minutes."

"Very well. Mr. Perley, I wonder if you happened to notice this? It appeared in last week's issue of the *Banner*." Carton extracted a clipping from his pocket and handed it to the other, who read, almost automatically, in a loud whisper:

> "*Wanted:*—Volumes 6 & 7, of Quarnoton's Scientific Work; left with Patrick McLaughlin some years since. Fair price will be paid, either, both volumes. Inquire BANNER office."

"Well, what of it?" inquired Perley. Was it imagination, or did his voice quiver slightly?

"I thought you might be interested to know that those volumes had been found."

"That's right," put in Hunkus, though he glanced

at Carton in some surprise. "I had a letter yesterday, telling me to discontinue the ad."

"The volumes are nothing to me," said Perley, starting to rise again. "Really, I'm not interested at all in the matter. And I have an appointment."

"The volumes in themselves may mean nothing to you. But perhaps the fact they were in Patrick McLaughlin's possession does. Certain things in them, or rather left in them, were very interesting to the parties who found the books. Would you like me to go on?"

Perley said nothing. His face was rather white now. But the little office was close and hot; perhaps he needed a breath of fresh air.

"By the way, Perley," continued Carton, dropping his voice, "let us change the subject for a moment. How long have you been interested in Allamoosook Lumber Company stock? That's a new one to me, and I try to follow the market closely. Or is the old company reorganizing?"

Perley stared. He was clasping and unclasping his fingers constantly. And when he answered his throat sounded dry. "Allamoosook Lumber Company? You must be joking. That company's been defunct for years; McLaughlin smashed them when he wrecked the bank. I guess that was before you came to town."

"I was new here then, certainly," admitted Carton. "But you have a poorer memory than your friend,

Deacon Crothers. He remembered that I lived here when these things happened."

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing much. There was one thing he didn't remember, because he never knew it. I was new here in town then. Nobody knows what I'm going to tell you, but I have a particularly good reason for being interested in all these matters. For Patrick McLaughlin's wife was my sister."

Perley started, but no more so than Hunkus. The former recovered from his surprise more quickly.

"That so?" he sneered. "I wouldn't spread it around too much if I were you. Might hurt your chances for reëlection, if you run. Even a connection by marriage wouldn't help you, with some of the voters whom McLaughlin stuck."

Carton drew a deep breath. A little red spot stood prominently out upon each cheek. Most evidently he was in a condition of great excitement.

"You dirty little hound," he hissed. "That is about what I expected from you, and why I'll show you no mercy now. It would take Hunkus here about one hour to get an extra on the street. That extra would make mighty interesting reading for a good many—with these facts that I've got here." He drew out the two dusty envelopes, and tossed them over to Hunkus. "Take good care of those, Joe—they're precious. And with what the people who got those

books can give us. Allamoosook stock, eh? You'll have more to explain than Allamoosook stock, Perley. Come, now, how about it?"

For one minute Perley tried to return Carton's stare. Then, all at once, he collapsed.

"For God's sake, no extra, Carton," he cried. "Not that. I'll see Crothers—I was just going to the bank anyway. We'll fix things some way. But no extra—the people would murder us if the truth came out."

Carton's gaze did not relent. He continued to look grimly at the agitated, pleading man.

"No extra," screamed Perley. "I don't ask for myself. But think of my family—my wife and son. Don't put this thing on them."

"Did you think of McLaughlin's wife?" asked Carton coldly. "My poor sister. And her baby girl? Lord, what didn't she go through? She dropped out like a thief in the night;—with that little child. I suppose the shame was too much for her. I was out of town at the time; when I came back she had gone and I lost all trace of her. Now do you think I should show any mercy for your wife and son?"

"We didn't intend to injure her," said Perley. "Or to ruin McLaughlin. But we were caught—when the crash came we all ducked for cover. We didn't plan it should all come down on his shoulders."

"But you let him take the blame. Because he trusted you. It was his own fault that he was so care-

less, but he thought every one as honest as himself. You fellows were speculating with the bank's money; and you know what that means. But I'm not your judge, and that was long ago. And there's one way out of it;—and if you'll get Crothers and Hodges up here, right off, I'll let you know what that way is. Tell them you've confessed, if they don't want to come."

Perley started up eagerly. "I'll go right after them."

"Hold on a minute. Just sign this before you go." Carton wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, and handed it to Perley. The man's face blanched as he read.

"Me sign this? And incriminate myself? You must be crazy."

Perley was much too agitated to be grammatical.

Carton smiled, very grimly indeed.

"Not altogether. I simply want to be sure that you come back. If you sign, I'm sure you will—if you don't sign, perhaps even the thoughts of that extra would not be enough to make you. Even your wife and son, and what this exposure might mean to them, possibly would not prevent you from taking the next train."

The stronger will conquered. Perley, turning away from the other's stern eyes, reached for a pen and scrawled his signature upon the paper with fingers that

trembled. A minute later the door banged to behind him, and they could hear his hurrying footsteps upon the stairway. In the half hour of waiting Carton refused to talk, but sat looking out of the dusty window. Hankus scribbled upon some editorial or other, but made little headway;—he was wondering just what the result of this thing might be, and it interfered seriously with his work. When the steps of several persons sounded upon the stairs, Carton turned from the window with a deep breath. There was a look of relief upon his face. Presently Deacon Samuel Crothers came in at the door, followed by Hodges, a red-faced, stout fellow who glanced about somewhat nervously. Perley slunk in at the rear; the ordinarily dapper little man acted very much like a cowardly little dog who had just received a sound whipping.

"Well?" growled Crothers. If he was disturbed, his manner did not show it. The bank president was more defiant than scared. He was made of different stuff than Digby Perley, or even fat Hodges, usually so ready to bluster.

"I suppose Mr. Perley has made the situation clear to you gentlemen," began Carton slowly. There was no answer. Crothers glowered. Hodges licked his lips with a coated tongue; he made one think of a fat and comfortable cat that has just been caught in the cream-pot. Perley seemed as miserable as the poor

traveler at sea in a storm. There are sensations even worse than sea-sickness.

"Mr. Hunkus has certain facts regarding the matter in his possession. And Perley doubtless told you that some volumes once left with Mr. McLaughlin have turned up, in which certain papers were found. Perhaps the information would not be sufficient for a court of law; I am not prepared to say. But it certainly would make interesting reading for the public. Mr. Perley's signed statement, as reproduced, would be interesting also."

The little room was very still; so still that the hoarse breathing of Hodges sounded like the exhaust of a speeding motor. Crothers stared at Carton a full minute before he dropped his eyes. When he spoke his voice was a low grumble.

"Well, what do you demand?"

"Very little. Simply that Patrick McLaughlin's name be cleared. You can go about it in any way that you please; protect yourselves all you can. I do not even demand restitution to those who lost money at the time. A shake-up in the bank now might ruin even more innocent ones; therefore so far as I am concerned, things may stand as they are. But McLaughlin's name must be cleared; I demand that."

Even Crothers seemed surprised. Hodges and Perley looked immensely relieved. There was another moment of silence.

"If we do this, we get those?" asked Crothers, then. His fat forefinger pointed at the dusty envelopes under the editor's hand.

"You do not," snapped Carton.

"But then what assurance do we have that you won't demand anything more?"

"My word. I'm a hard man, maybe, Crothers; but at least there is one thing no man has ever called me. I am not a liar."

Crothers hunched his shoulders, and lowered his head. He looked like a big, angry bull, meditating a charge in rather cramped quarters. But he made no step forward; and it was noticeable that when he spoke he did not consult either of the men behind him. He took it for granted they would do as he decided.

"Very well. We'll clear McLaughlin. But mind you, Carton, and you too, Hunkus, that I admit nothing. I don't know what this fool here has admitted, or what he did twenty years ago. He may be guilty as hell. But I admit nothing—remember that."

Carton spoke as pleasantly as he might have done to some prominent constituent at a social affair.

"That's all I've asked of you, Mr. Crothers. But be sure you clear McLaughlin. You may admit or deny whatever you please."

He did not seem to notice the other's anger. Neither was the smile upon his lips triumphant. Certainly it

was not sneering. The three, filing out, looked at him rather curiously. Doubtless they were trying to comprehend the man's attitude; but without success. The red-haired editor stared curiously also at his friend. But when Carton sank weakly into a chair, he sprang up in frank amazement. Carton laughed, rather hysterically.

"You're a student, Joe," he exclaimed. "Doubtless you know your psychology, don't you? Interesting subject,—especially as it relates to worry, uncertainty, a guilty conscience maybe, and what these things may lead to. The psychology of fear, you know."

"Eh, yes," said Hunkus, rather vaguely. "Though I don't believe I just get you."

"No? Well, call it a bluff then. Sometimes a bluff works. You understand that;—I know you've played poker. By the way, who in the devil put in that ad—about the two books left with McLaughlin? And what did they want the things for, anyway?"

Hunkus was thunderstruck. "You don't know? Why, you told how the books had been found."

"Merely a lucky stab. I knew nothing about them, really, or why they were wanted."

The editor's face was a study. "But these envelopes," he shouted. "Surely they contain some evidence?"

"They look old enough, don't they? That was one

of the things I figured on. But,—well, open 'em if you want to."

Hunkus did so. From one a bundle of clippings rolled out—extracts from old speeches and the like. The other envelope was more bulky; Hunkus opened it carefully. There dropped out various little packages, such as congressmen send to their friends back home. The packages contained—garden-seeds.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRUGGLE IN THE DARK

WEARILY carrying pickaxe and spade, down the hillside came Dick Tarbox and Chichester Somers, just as Ray and Millie Colleen stepped out from the little punt that had brought them over from the mainland. Both young men were hot and tired, and Tarbox voiced his views rather plainly. He displayed a pair of palms, upon which great red blisters had swollen during the day. Ray was amused, but Millie grew sympathetic on the instant.

"You poor boy," she said pityingly. "I've some cold cream up at the tent; don't you suppose that would help them?"

"It's too big a contract," said Somers. "I didn't dream that this digging was so much work. And it would take years of time, probably, going at it in this hit or miss fashion."

"You're not giving up this soon?" shot Ray, quickly.

"Of course not. But we must solve the riddle of that cipher. There must be some way of getting at the solution."

"No doubt. Speaking of ciphers reminds me. Our friend Professor Gibbs will probably call on us this evening."

"Call? Out here?" shouted Somers. "Well, I must say I admire his impudence."

"How about my matter?" asked Tarbox, anxiously.

"It's all right. Gibbs admitted that he had been rather hasty in his action, after I handed him your check. He apologized very handsomely, too, for his discourtesy to me in my office the other morning. Said he wouldn't have blamed me if I had kicked him out."

"Did he speak of the books?" asked Hildegarde.

"Not directly. But I think he's coming out to talk over the matter. He is bringing some one with him to influence you, Mrs. Somers."

"Who?" she asked, indignantly.

"Don't be too surprised. Your mother came on the boat this morning, and is at the Titus House."

Somers looked a bit anxiously at his wife. For a second she seemed so surprised that she was at a loss for words. When she did speak, her feeling of indignation was plainly evident.

"I can't see why Professor Gibbs should have such an influence over mother. She seems to have implicit confidence in him. But I shall not give up the books, even to please her. Father intended them to be mine; when he put the clause in his will that he did, I don't

suppose it ever occurred to him mother would marry again. Poor, dear mother;—I hate to displease her, too. And I suppose she is furious at me for not answering the wireless she sent me on the boat."

"We want to watch Gibbs, and closely," said Somers. "I believe that he's the man responsible for last night's alarm. Of course, perhaps he wasn't here in person; but I firmly believe it was some of his creatures."

The allusion to the previous night's trouble seemed to cast a feeling of gloom over the company. The girls especially grew very serious; doubtless they were thinking that another night was fast coming on. Millie Colleen soon voiced her apprehensions.

"Those tents must come down on the shore. I won't stay another night up near those spruces on the hillside; and it's too close to those horrid ruins anyway." She gave a little, nervous laugh. "Do you know the feeling I've had all day? That old Captain Gideon Badd was annoyed at our trespassing; and that he is responsible for those weird noises. I know it sounds foolish, here in daylight; but I shan't be able to shake it off after it gets dark again."

"The tents won't be sheltered on the shore," objected Somers. "The beach gets the full sweep of the wind. And it blows pretty hard, too, I should judge, in a southerly breeze."

"I don't care for the wind," she returned, tossing

her head. "I know what that is. It's what I don't know about that frightens me, and sets my imagination at work."

Hildegarde sided with Millie, so the men, rather reluctantly (for Somers and Tarbox were dog tired), began to take down the tents, and to drag the baggage to a new site. Thus the hour of supper was rather late, and the five were hardly seated about the fire, when the creaking of oar-locks sounded from around the point, followed a few seconds after by the light splash of oars. A moment after that, Dill Chandler's dory slid out of the shadows; two passengers sat in the ends of the boat. As it grated upon the beach, Professor Gibbs jumped out, and stretched up an assisting hand to the lady.

"Mother," said Hildegarde, rather weakly, and standing up.

The lady came forward with the Professor, who had gallantly removed his Homburg hat, disclosing all the glories of his bushy red hair. Mrs. DeForest was stout, dignified, and possessed of a strong chin. In certain circumstances, thought her new son-in-law uncomfortably, it was conceivable that she might be amiable; just now her manner was decidedly cool. She surveyed the company very much as a constable, desirous of showing his authority, might have looked over some band of wandering gypsies. Hildegarde stepped out to meet her mother, and the good lady put

down her cheek to be kissed, but with no change in her chilly manner. Gibbs broke the rather awkward silence.

"Ah, good-evening. No hard feelings, I trust, after the other morning. Allow me to present Mrs. DeForest." His gesture included their entire circle. Mrs. DeForest bowed, and remained very cold.

"You will pardon me for rushing at once into business," continued the Professor, "but our time is somewhat limited. For some reason Mr. Chandler, who kindly rowed us over, doesn't seem to care for this neighborhood after dusk." Was it fancy, thought Somers, or could a strain of irony be detected in the man's smooth voice? "Also, Mrs. DeForest is not accustomed to the chill night air of this northern coast. Our business relates, as you may surmise, to the books of Mrs. DeForest's late husband, now her property under the terms of the will that he left."

"I think you are mistaken," put in Hildegarde, more spiritedly than her friends had expected. "The books in question were merely in mother's custody until I should be married. I think you met my husband the other morning."

Mrs. DeForest favored her son-in-law with a long stare. Evidently she was about to speak, but the Professor broke in.

"He was not, unfortunately, your husband the other morning; at least not when I was in Squire Ray's

office. I had occasion to examine the town clerk's records this afternoon. You will, perhaps, allow me to congratulate you on your—er—expediency—perhaps dispatch would be a more appropriate word—in making him such, so shortly after our somewhat stormy interview. I congratulate Mr. Somers, of course, on his good fortune in obtaining such a charming wife; but I can hardly commend him for his foresight, the more especially so as I also noticed by the marriage records he gave his occupation as lawyer. But then it is not to be expected that young attorneys should be familiar with all the phases of their profession. Squire Ray, though, who I note performed the ceremony, should have been better informed. I am sure that he must know that a marriage at that time makes no difference in the status of our matter. Miss DeForest—rather Mrs. Somers—was not married when she left Boston, unlawfully taking the books. And her subsequent marriage does not justify or condone such unlawful action. Therefore, in behalf of Mrs. DeForest, I make a demand for the five volumes."

"Yes, indeed," put in that lady. "Hildegarde, hand them over to Professor Gibbs immediately. I am more than surprised that you had the temerity to take them in the first place. I shall not try to tell you now how much your actions have shocked and pained me. You will repent the rash and headstrong thing you have done. Of course you are of age, so I suppose

there is no way that this—this," she looked at Somers contemptuously, yet her voice trembled, "this gentleman can be punished. You may come home of course —as you will wish to do when you see your mistake. But—don't bring this—this fortune-hunter there." Her low, well-bred voice cut like the lash of a tight-drawn whip. But there was a deal of the mother in the daughter.

"Please don't speak of fortune-hunters, mother. Just why is Professor Gibbs so anxious to possess these books, or to marry you? But I shall never turn over the books to him,—never."

"You will turn them over to your mother;—before you are through with us," snapped Gibbs, his ugly temper evident though he strove to control himself. "It is unpleasant to threaten a daughter with criminal proceedings before her mother;—but that man, who doubtless married you to obtain the books, shall not have them. I doubt if any of you can read the cipher anyway, while I know that I can. And a civil action of replevin will suffice to put the books in the hands of their legal custodian. You will hardly incur the dangers of contempt of court, any of you—by paying no attention to a writ of replevin. Squire Ray knows the law too well for that. Come, my dear," he turned to Mrs. DeForest, "let us be getting back to town."

"Just once more, Hildegarde," said Mrs. DeForest.

'Do you absolutely refuse to turn the books over to me, your mother?"

"Mother, you don't understand," almost wailed the girl. She was plainly upon the verge of sobs. "But I can't turn over the books—even to you. They are mine. Father meant them for me. You ought to know it."

"Very well," said the mother icily. She compressed her lips firmly. "I shall be sorry to see my daughter threatened with legal action, surely. But the law must take its course, as it must always do. Good-night." She moved away toward the dory, without looking back—the very personification of the stern, unyielding New England matron, of the aristocratic class and caste. Such women will die for a principle; and Mrs. DeForest was very sure that she was in the right. Undoubtedly she would not have yielded, or softened one appreciable atom, had she looked back and seen her daughter, crumpled in a little, sobbing heap upon the fire-lit sands, Somers bending over her with anxious face. But as it happened she did not cast a single glance behind; nor did Gibbs—who was a veritable pantomime of wrath, as he strode in the direction of the waiting dory. The anxious Chandler lost no time in shoving off, after his passengers had climbed clumsily overside. In three minutes the sound of his oars had died away—even as his craft was lost to sight in the night. By that time Hildegarde had re-

gained control of her emotions, and she winked back the tears in a sorry little attempt to smile at her sympathetic companions.

"You will excuse me?" she said. "Of course I feel that I'm in the right—still, naturally, I am rather broken up. I am going to lie down a little while in the tent."

After she had gone a little silence fell upon the group. Tarbox, in a clumsy effort to be useful, was unskilfully attempting the opening of a box of Norwegian sardines. A jerk of the opener in his awkward hands sent a piece of the jagged tin tearing across his finger, from which the blood began to spurt in a quick stream. Millie, all anxiety, was swift to tie up the wound in her own soft handkerchief; a few minutes later the two strolled away from the fire, and up the beach. Old Ray looked after them with quizzical eyes. Somers, moodily engrossed in his thoughts, scarce noted that the two had disappeared.

"What do you think, Squire," he shot out suddenly, "or couldn't you make anything out of Gibbs' manner this evening? I've more than a suspicion that the man knows more about this ghostly nonsense than he should, myself."

Ray shook his head. "I can't agree with you there. I'm not a superstitious man, naturally. But there are some things in the universe that human laws cannot explain. Give me the least thing I can cling to, and

I'll gladly swing round to your theory. But look at it logically. We five are the only people on this little island; there is no possible hiding place that I know of where any persons could be concealed. And the only way any one could get out here would be by boat. If there had been any kind of a craft on these waters we must have seen it last night, or heard it at least. There is no question about the noises; and while I would not swear to it on the witness stand, I am pretty positive I saw a shape of some kind. And the tents—at least one—were pulled down. Of course there is some cause; but I cannot believe that Gibbs or any other man is responsible. I'll admit I'm rather thoroughly shaken; if it wasn't that I hate to be a quitter, I should never spend another night upon Little Clam Island."

Somers made no answer. The two smoked moodily in silence, until Tarbox and Millie appeared. By general consent the camp was then prepared for the night. Somers and Tarbox were tired out after their long day's labor, at a kind of work to which each man was totally unaccustomed. And the others were quite ready for bed. Hildegarde, in fact, had gone fast asleep, as Millie discovered when she crept softly into their tent. It was not long before lights were extinguished;—only the fire gleamed softly upon the beach. For a few hours the treasure-hunters might dream of hidden wealth in precious stones and gold,

which they no doubt were more likely to see in the visions of the night than to glimpse in daylight, when stern reality rules.

But they were not all asleep, for an hour after the fire had begun to die down, a man crept very carefully out from the shadowy end of the tents. He crawled very carefully—that no flickering gleam from the fire might flash its rays upon him. Presently he disappeared, without a sound, into the dark shadows of the hillside. Surely no ghost could have moved more quietly; even an alert watcher, from a post by the fireside, would not have been likely to see the creeping figure.

The camp was still wrapped in slumber, though doubtless the sleepers slept but lightly, and ready to be aroused by the least sound unaccounted for. For certainly that first wailing cry that came down from the hillside, out of the night, was hardly enough to have disturbed the average sleeper of good digestion and untroubled conscience. Yet it brought the campers, without an exception, up from their blankets with a cold chill. Tarbox, reaching hastily under his knapsack pillow for the match-box he had thoughtfully placed there, called in a low voice to Somers. But only the startled and grumbling voice of Skilayton Ray answered, calling for some one to light the lantern, and quickly. The girls had already lighted their lamp; evidently they had gone to bed fully dressed.

For they came tearing out while Ray was still struggling into his jacket, and Dick, in sleepy-eyed haste, pulling on his shoes. The wailing, mournful sound was plainer now; it swept down upon their ears as they looked at each other with startled faces. Then suddenly there was a sound which, though indeed they recognized it, startled them even more. It was the quick report of an automatic pistol—fired five times in snappy, rapid succession, "Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang!" Followed by a wild cry, ringing down the hillside, fiercely triumphant or exultant.

"Dick, Squire Ray, quick—help me. I've got 'em!" Then came the sounds of a struggle, like big, angry dogs might make rolling over and over upon the ground. Tarbox, without an instant's hesitation, was up the hillside like a shot—he went as swift and straight to the noise of the battle as travels a well-aimed bowler's ball. And old Ray, to his credit, was no mean second, as he puffed up over the slippery grass. Neither did a presence of mind gained from long years in the conflicts of courts desert him now. As he ran he snatched up an oar, one of those which belonged to their little punt now hauled up on the beach. It made a formidable weapon, with its broad, sharp-edged blade, as the running man swung it around his head.

And assistance was needed in that struggle in the dark. Somers was evidently under the struggling

heap, for his voice came up from the pile; but chokingly, as if some hand was closing on his throat. Tarbox had gone into the pile like a football player striking the line, his arms well around his antagonist. Evidently, from the young man's vivid expressions, he was slowly pinning his opponent down. But the fellow wrestling with Somers seemed to be on top;—some burly individual, whose face could not be seen, but who wore whiskers. A brooding antagonism against Gibbs was in Ray's sweeping stroke of the oar. The flat blade came down on the man's head with the impact of a loaded black-jack. He dropped forward, down on his face, as Somers rolled out from underneath and sprang to his feet. For a moment an awful fear gripped about the old lawyer's heart;—was it possible that he had killed a man? His mind's eye looked in one vivid glimpse down the long, shameful avenue of the criminal courts, that leads to the strong-barred felon's cell at its far end, which fronts on Murderers' Row. Then the fallen man groaned—and Squire Ray began to feel better. Somers had assisted Tarbox in overcoming his man;—now he shouted for a light. Already a lantern was coming up the hillside. The girls were more afraid to stay back by the camp than to come up to the scene of struggle. The rays of the lantern were feeble, but they lighted the battle-ground sufficiently.

But it was not Gibbs who lay unconscious upon the

ground, but a man whom Somers had never seen before. Not a thug either—the type of man who could be hired to perpetrate an outrage. But a man with a good face, though trouble-lined and old;—a roughly dressed man, but certainly not a common workman. Ray gave a slight exclamation, snatched the lantern, and knelt upon his knees by the man he had struck down. For a minute he looked into the white face; when he rose, no visage could have expressed greater surprise than his.

"Do you know him?" asked Somers.

"Do I know him?"—but Ray was interrupted. The man pinioned under Tarbox began to speak.

"Don't you think you might let me up?" he said. "I can't do anything now—with McMullen knocked out so completely, even if I wished." He spoke in a gentle, well-bred voice, the tones without question of a cultured and educated man. One of the women, standing in the background, gave a sort of startled little cry.

"McMullen?" said Ray. "McMullen? Why, this man's name isn't McMullen—it's McLaughlin. This man lying here is certainly Patrick McLaughlin. It's like seeing some man from the grave—I supposed he was dead years ago."

"McLaughlin?" shouted Somers. "Patrick McLaughlin!" His surprise prevented any further speech.

"Well, McLaughlin, then," said the other, whom

Tarbox had allowed to rise. "You seem to know him; —though he has called himself McMullen for years."

They looked at the speaker curiously, under the faint light from the lantern. He was a tall man, well past fifty, with graying hair; trim, pointed beard, and a keenly intellectual face. Despite his rough garb of khaki, and his mud-stained puttees, he would never have been mistaken for an ordinary laborer. He might well have been some college professor, on a hard walking tour.

"Just what were you doing here—playing at ghosts?" asked Somers. "And where in the devil did you come from, anyway?" The scholarly looking man smiled.

"It was a rather childish proceeding," he admitted. "I told McMullen—McLaughlin rather—as much, but he would have it so. In fact it was about as crazy as the idea which brought us here; though the place has seemed familiar to me from the first." He hesitated, with rather a puzzled expression on his features.

"Why did you attack us?"

"We made no attack; it was the other way. Of course we rather foolishly tried to frighten people off, and indeed succeeded until your party camped on the island. On the contrary, you, sir," he glanced at Somers, "assaulted us with a revolver. You might have killed somebody."

"I fired well in the air," said Somers. "I had no

intention of killing anybody. And you are trespassers on my island, as it happens."

Hildegarde had stepped forward; almost uncertainly she put her hand upon the stranger's arm. When she spoke, in a voice that trembled, the others were literally dumbfounded.

"Father," she said. "Father. Don't you know me, little Hildegarde—of ten years ago?"

The gentleman stared at her in some surprise. He had not noticed the presence of ladies before. Now he took off his cap. "Pardon me, madam, but there must be some mistake," he answered. "I am unmarried."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOLE BENEATH THE RUINS

"DISSOCIATION of personality," said Ray. "Sometimes called double or multiple personality. A strange and wonderful phenomenon—concerning which little is known by either doctors or psychologists. I had occasion to make a rather deep study of the matter in the Todd will case, in which I appeared for the contestants of the will. Secondary personality may be caused by various things;—it sometimes follows dyspepsia, or exhaustion of vitality, but the more common cause is some accident to the person who loses his identity. Such as a blow on the head, or a bad fall, for instance. Mind you, I do not say this is the case with your father. But as he persists in refusing to recognize or remember you, that may be an explanation. I can think of nothing else." He shook his head in perplexed fashion, as he looked toward the tent in which McLaughlin and Forester,—for that was the name the other had given—were now asleep. McLaughlin had recovered consciousness, but was still in weakened condition; and Forester had asked that he

too might be allowed a chance of sleep. As yet the two men had given no explanation of how they had reached the island undiscovered, or as to why they were there.

Hildegarde looked more worried than ever as she sat by the old lawyer's side on the beach. It was the first hour in a new day's morning; for the second time in his life Tarbox had seen a sunrise. The morning breeze blew a fresh salt smell from the bay, and everything was glorified by the rays of the morning sun.

"Is there a possibility of his identity being restored?" she asked, anxiously. Ray shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know enough about the subject to answer you. There are strange cases on record, but very little positive knowledge of the matter. However, I have a suggestion, though it may be of no worth whatever. It is not strange that your presence fails to recall your father to his real self, for you were only a little girl when he disappeared, and must have changed greatly in ten years of time. But, should he meet your mother, such meeting possibly would shock him into recollection. It would, of course, be a considerable ordeal for the good lady, but then, what else? It is impossible that she marry Gibbs now, while she is still your father's wife, whether Mr. DeForest is restored to his proper personality or not."

"At least it clears up the matter of the books," put in Somers, who had been pacing the beach in deep thought. "Of course, as your father is not dead, his will has no effect, consequently the books are his. However, we have some rights still in the two volumes left with McLaughlin. In fact, they descend to me—for my great-uncle never really sold them. Of course I shall pay Millie here the reward, for she found them for us when we advertised."

"Gibbs loses out at all events," said Ray. "However, whoever controls the volumes, they are of little use until the cipher is solved."

"Well, I'll go and dress myself properly, now that the excitement is over," said Tarbox. "I've been running around here half the night in an old flannel shirt with boots unlaced. I think a clean shirt would brace me up a bit. Even if we go back to digging, like dagoes, so soon as breakfast is over."

He reached carefully into the tent in which McLaughlin and DeForest slept soundly, if not peacefully, and drew forth the little grip in which all the worldly possessions he had brought to Sanoset were kept. If he dressed in the tent he might awaken the tired men; so he climbed up over the hillside and into a thick clump of trees that concealed him from the sight of the camp. For a young man who had just lost twenty thousand dollars—a neat little fortune to the average citizen—Tarbox seemed in wonderfully good spirits.

Perhaps the walk he had taken that very morning, under the red rays of the rising sun, along the beach, and in the company of a vivacious young lady, had considerable to do with his state of cheerfulness.

Five seconds after he had passed behind the screen of the trees, the young man came flying down the hillside, covering the ground in great leaps. The others stared at him in surprise as he raced toward them. Miss Colleen immediately thought of snakes—though nothing more harmful than a non-poisonous if vicious-looking black snake was apt to be upon their island. And Tarbox would have hardly run in this fashion from a mere snake. He approached them—panting and breathless.

"Great guns, Dick, what's the matter?" Somers voiced the question for the company. His friend thrust forward the long envelope in his hand.

"Just look at that," he panted. Somers stared.

"It looks harmless."

"You don't understand." With a quick movement Tarbox tore open the envelope, and disclosed to wondering eyes a thick packet of bills—gold certificates—crisp, new money, and apparently of large denomination. His own face was more surprised even than the faces of his friends.

"It's the Gibbs money—that I thought was stolen," he cried.

"What?" shouted the four—all in the same breath.

And it was with one voice that they followed with another question: "Where did you find it?"

Tarbox sat down rather weakly upon a convenient log;—surprise had made him weak. He looked at the package of bills very much as if he expected it either to dissolve into smoke of expensive density or to take wings and vanish by flight into the air. After all, two of the commonest routes by which money is accustomed to travel, in certain circles, and in these exceedingly stirring times. But the money still stayed in his hands;—he was not dreaming—it was really there. His friends could see it as well as he could himself.

"In my bag—just now, when I opened it to take out a fresh shirt. There it lay, this envelope, in plain sight. How did it get there;—huh, ask me something easy. It wasn't there when I last used the bag, yesterday; and you know it certainly hasn't been in this bag the past few days. I couldn't have overlooked it;—you know that, Chick; you went through the bag yourself a couple of times."

"Mystery seems piling upon mystery," said Ray, puzzled. "We hardly solve one before another pops up—even more mysterious. Though we haven't solved this ghost business yet—except to make sure we were dealing with flesh and blood people instead of spirits. If it was ghosts, I could accept their comings and goings without too much wonderment, for I've always

understood that all spirits in good and regular standing emerge from thin air, and just as suddenly vanish into it. But with McLaughlin and DeForest there it's a little different. I've been all around the island since daylight, and I'll swear there's no boat anywhere. So how they got here is as much of a mystery as ever."

"Well, come to breakfast, all of you," called Hildegarde, thinking of her smoking coffee-pot, and running toward the camp-fire. "Maybe a good cup of coffee will give us all some new ideas. And we must hurry with breakfast—for it's going to be a busy day. I'm going in with you and Millie this morning, Mr. Ray, to tell mother of father turning up. And then I shall consult a doctor, of course."

"That'll be Tabby Brack. It'll be nuts for the old doc;—a case like this. He's a splendid physician, too; but I doubt if he'll know anything about your father's trouble. You probably won't find a man short of New York who does."

"And we'll stay here and interview our new friends," said Somers to Tarbox. "They'll have some interesting things to tell us, no doubt."

Skilayton Ray looked serious once more.

"You boys be careful not to talk of this, and you, too, young ladies. Remember McLaughlin is still under a cloud over there at Crawtown; for all I know there may be some old indictments against him on the docket. I'm going to telephone Joe Hunkus to-day,

and have him come over to the island to-night if he will. Joe was quite a friend of McLaughlin's, and we can talk over what's best to be done. There's something else on my mind, too, that will surprise all of you—though I shan't know what to do about that until after I talk with Hunkus."

So when McLaughlin and DeForest stepped out of the tent an hour or so after the others had eaten, they found only two awaiting them, Somers and Tarbox, smoking by the fire. Somers went forward to meet the older men, holding out his hand with a frank smile.

"Hope you're rested up a little. We've got some coffee boiling for you, now. How's the rap on the head, Mister McLaughlin? Excuse me—my name is Somers, and this is my friend, Dick Tarbox. I expect we're here after the same thing that brought you—pirate's treasure. Am I right?"

As his name was spoken McLaughlin stepped back in surprise. An expression akin to fear shone in his eyes. For a moment he hesitated, as if choosing his words carefully.

"I shall deny nothing," he said. "What use—some one in this country would be sure to identify me, sooner or later. That's one reason I've kept hidden so carefully. But kindly address me as McMullen, if you please; I'm more used to that name now."

"Just as you please, of course. But don't worry

about us, sir. We are not detectives; and from what we've heard of that old business, we're inclined to think you had a mighty raw deal. But there's one thing we're damned curious about. How did you fellows get on the island here without being seen?"

McLaughlin smiled faintly behind his beard. He was a care-worn man with sorrowful eyes,—and even when he smiled there was something pathetic in his expression.

"I might ask you your right to ask, young man? Do you own this property?"

"An undivided half of it, anyway. But of course you don't know. I'm Captain Rowland Bridger's grand-nephew, and when he died his property came to me. Including his share in this island, of course."

"I see. How about it, Forester?" He glanced at the man who was really DeForest, and Hildegarde's father. In the features of the man the face of Mrs. Somers stood forth, and very plainly. Somers was gazing at the strong resemblance. There was something hauntingly familiar, too, about McLaughlin's face, though for the life of him Somers could not tell where he had seen it before, if ever. Forester (rather DeForest) was answering McLaughlin with a nod.

"We didn't come to the island," said McLaughlin.

"I don't think I quite understand you."

"Perhaps I should have said that we didn't come

recently. We were here. Have been here about three months."

"But where, in Heaven's name then, did you stay? There's hardly a rat-hole on the whole island."

"Apparently, no. But my friend, Forester, knew of a place. You see he's been here before. Though in fact he swears he never was. But he went straight to this place anyway, and he has to admit that the island seems familiar. But ——" and McLaughlin lowered his voice, and drew Somers to one side. "Since you know my real name, I'm going to tell you something. When I was president of the Crawtown Bank, before things went to smash, this man, Forester (which isn't his name) came there one day with your great-uncle, Captain Bridger. They left two books—something to do with a supposed hidden treasure on Little Clam Island—with me for safe-keeping. What became of those books I don't know; I suppose they went to the gang of crooks that ruined me, along with everything else I owned. In San Francisco, last winter, I ran upon Forester, and recognized him as the man who left the books along with your great-uncle. But I couldn't remember the man's name. He denied the whole thing;—said he had never been in Maine even. I thought he was bluffing at first. But actually, I don't think Forester remembers the incident at all. I can't understand it. Things were pretty low with me, and worse with Forester; he was clerking in a bookstore

for seven dollars a week, and starving to death. So I took a wild chance. I had funds enough to bring both of us east. And I thought if we came to this island—I knew where Little Clam Island was—perhaps Forester would recollect things, and there might be a chance we could find the treasure, if in fact it ever existed. Blessed if when we landed here (and we had to work mighty secretly, that nobody would find out) if he didn't take me right to a hiding-place that he'd discovered, evidently, years ago. But the funny part is, he still swears he never was on the island; though he admits it seems strangely familiar. Now, what do you think of that?"

"Would you know his real name if you heard it?" asked Somers, in sudden excitement.

"I think so. I've tried to think of it often. Sometimes I nearly have it; then it just eludes me. But I think I'd remember, for I wrote it down in one of those books left with me for safe-keeping."

"Was it DeForest—Haven DeForest?"

McLaughlin's face worked strangely. Then, all at once, he slapped his knee. "By Jove, that's it! Haven DeForest. By all the powers! I've come as near to it as possible a dozen times—and couldn't hit it. But that was the name, all right."

Somers tapped his head significantly.

"Some accident threw him off his base," he explained quickly. "That's why he didn't remember this

island, or leaving the books with you. But hold on; he knew your name was McLaughlin. He admitted that last night."

"Sure. I told him that when I was trying to make him remember leaving the books."

Tarbox was frowning at them impatiently, as Somers noticed.

"We've some things to tell you, Mr. McLaughlin," he said. "But let them wait now. Will you show us the hiding-place that you speak of?"

With no more words McLaughlin led the way. They climbed up over the hill, and into a corner of the blocked up cellar, surrounded by the tumbling ruins of Gideon Badd's old mansion. In one corner was a pile of great slate blocks, fallen in apparent confusion from the cellar wall. The man pushed one of these aside, which lay on the edge of the heap. Underneath was a small hole, through which it hardly seemed a man of any size could squeeze his body. But McLaughlin dropped in and out of sight, and Somers followed. He found his feet on the steps of a rude ladder that led down into the depths. At its foot was a sort of cellar-like room, apparently well underground. McLaughlin was lighting the stub of a candle, set on a box that evidently made the table. There was absolutely nothing in the shape of furniture, only boxes, and blankets thrown over spruce boughs for beds. McLaughlin pointed at the ladder, down

which Tarbox was descending, followed by DeForest.

"We had to make that," he explained. "It was too hard getting in and out otherwise. This room seems to have been a sort of sub-cellar, under the main cellar of Badd's house. We have lived here for three months;—the very carelessness of the covering over the entrance made detection improbable. Few would ever have thought of shoving aside that stone, which seemed to be merely one of a pile in the ruins. I imagine originally there was a sort of stairway into the main cellar, which has gradually been blocked up until only this hole was left."

Now that Somers' eyes were more used to the dim light he was staring about in surprise. The sides had been dug away, and apparently the work was recent. McLaughlin noted his look.

"You see we have not been idle. But our labor has met with no result. Now we are up against the ledge on all four sides, so we cannot dig any more. It was a considerable job, for all the earth we dug out from the sides had to be sacked up that ladder, and dumped below the water line, where the tide would carry it off and leave no marks of excavation on the island. I had an idea that there might be some sort of treasure chamber, that connected originally with this sub-cellar. But three months' hard labor has shown my mistake."

"Move your stuff down to our camp," said Somers,

as he departed with Tarbox, a few minutes later. "I won't explain now, but you'll see to-night, McLaughlin; provided things turn out as we hope. In any case, DeForest has as much claim on a possible treasure as any of us, whether restored to his identity or not. And of course you come in with him." The others accepted the invitation, with evident reluctance, however, on Forester's part.

"He doesn't care much for strangers," whispered McLaughlin. "But I'll see that he comes down. I'm glad this business of digging daytimes and playing ghosts at night is over, myself. That ghost business was well enough to scare off possible intruders among the country people. They're rather superstitious, many of them. If we had dreamed who you were we shouldn't have tried it the last two nights;—but we thought it an ordinary camping party, whom we might frighten away."

"By Jove, if they only knew how they had us going," grinned Tarbox, as he walked down the hillside with Somers. "I'll never laugh at a superstitious person again;—the strain runs somewhere in all of us. A dark night, unusual circumstances, and a touch of the weird, is liable to make a man believe almost anything. There, we never asked how they pulled off their stunts; I'm curious to find that out, certainly."

Thus Ray and the girls, returning from Sanoset about supper-time, found their company increased by

two. There was a peculiar look upon Hildegarde's face as she drew Somers aside.

"I had no chance to talk with mother alone, on account of the Professor. But finally she consented to come out here to-night, with Mr. Gibbs. Of course I had no chance to speak to her of father and his condition, but the promise I finally made induced them to come."

"What was that?" asked Somers. She smiled very slightly.

"I promised to turn the books over to their lawful owner."

As they rejoined the others, a rowboat shot around the point and headed in for the beach. For a moment they thought it was Professor Gibbs, for the man at the oars was a fellow with flaring red hair, but the other occupant was a man and not Mrs. DeForest. However, as the boat slid into the shore, Somers recognized Editor Hunkus, of the *Banner*. The other man was a stranger to most of the party, though Ray seemed to know him. And a strange look shot across his old face as he muttered: "Smithfield Carton, by jiminy."

The visitors came slowly along the beach toward the fire. McLaughlin looked at them—then sprang to his feet. "For the Lord's sake," he ejaculated.

Hunkus was holding out his hands warmly. He hardly noticed any one except McLaughlin.

"You remember me, Patrick," he was saying, in a voice that broke, spite of all efforts at control. "Joe Hunkus."

"Sure, Joe. Could any one forget that hair?" Then the man's face grew serious again. For Carton was holding out his hand.

"You remember me?" he said. "Mildred's brother."

Still McLaughlin did not offer his hand. There was a strained silence, broken by Hunkus.

"Shake hands with Carton, Patrick," he boomed. "He can explain. And he's cleared you in the old matter."

"Cleared me?" There was a note of unbelief in the voice.

"Yes, cleared you. Crothers and some of his friends have issued a statement, exonerating you of all blame. They say indisputable evidence has turned up, which shows it. All Crawtown is wild over the thing; —you'd be the most popular man in the county should you drop in on them."

McLaughlin sat down, limply, upon a convenient box. There was a tense silence. Everybody was watching the man. After a minute he laughed harshly.

"Cleared?" they heard him muttering. "Well, it's too late now. What use to clear a broken man?"

"You can come back, Pat," said Hunkus, approaching. The other looked up listlessly.

"I'm not pitying myself, Joe. It makes damned little difference so far as I'm concerned. But my wife —my wife, and little daughter. What of them? Why, I don't even know what became of them."

Hunkus could make no comforting answer to that. He stood looking down at the man, who sat with his face buried in his hands. Carton was kicking at a stray piece of seaweed savagely. Suddenly old Ray rose to his feet, and walked slowly toward the sitting man. What he might have been going to say was interrupted. There came the sound of voices from out around the point, and another boat slid into sight. This time one of the passengers was a woman—Mrs. DeForest. Gibbs, the male passenger, helped her as she sprang from the bow to the beach.

As the two advanced toward the crowd at the fire, it could be seen that Gibbs was smiling. Had he been within ear-shot they would have heard him saying:

"I told you she'd give in when she found we meant business." Evidently the Professor was in for a surprise.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO REUNIONS

THE peripeteia of real life—so the dramatist terms reversals of fortune, or the turning of the tables—are said to be frequent. The crumbling of an air castle may be well called mental peripeteia. Professor Gibbs looked radiantly confident as he strode along Little Clam Island's stony beach, assured that the books he coveted would soon be in his possession; for he was sure that Mrs. DeForest, his fiancée, would turn over the volumes to him as soon almost as she received them. It may seem that the books and the cipher written in them were of little use to any one who had not the island upon which Gideon Badd had presumably cached his jewels and gold. Professor Gibbs, however, felt sure that it was essential the cipher be solved in order to ascertain the treasure's location. He was confident that he had the key to the cipher. And he was more than confident that, possessed of the volumes and with the solution of the cipher, he would be in position to barter his knowledge for a sizable

share in the hidden wealth of the old pirate. Gibbs had builded his castle in the air, forgetting that such castles are prone to crumble and vanish away when touched by ill fortune's tiniest breath. And, so far as Gibbs' personal interests were concerned, it was certainly not good fortune that the man strode so confidently to meet.

Under the rosy light from the setting sun, the group upon the beach might have formed the conventional tableau in a play, drawn together especially and purposely for the climax of the melodrama. McLaughlin sat on his box, head buried in hands. Hunkus stood with one hand upon the despondent man's shoulder. Ray, arrested in the act of speech, had whirled half about to regard the man and woman coming toward them. Carton still kicked viciously in the soft sand. Hildegarde had risen to her feet, and already was stepping into the foreground of the picture. Somers, breathing nervously, stood a few paces behind her. Tarbox and Millie were half hidden from sight by the fire's curling smoke; they had drawn close together as they looked on, and, almost unconsciously, were holding hands. Forester, or DeForest, still smoked quietly in his seat by the fire. Apparently he —with the possible exception of McLaughlin—was the only one who had not noticed the two that came along the beach.

"Good-evening, all," said Gibbs. "Well, Mrs.

Somers, you see that we are here. I believe you promised to turn over certain property to your mother this evening, provided we came out to get it."

"I made a promise, certainly," admitted Hildegarde, in a low voice. Plainly, though, she was laboring under intense, if suppressed, excitement. "But not exactly in those words, Professor Gibbs. I said, I believe, that I would turn the books over to their legal owner."

"We won't quibble over the exact words," snapped Gibbs, a little annoyed. "Your meaning was clear enough. Your mother is the owner of the books."

"I had every moral right to them, even under the will," returned the girl. "And I am not willing to admit but that I had a legal right to them also. However, we need not discuss the question now—for the will has no effect."

Gibbs' jaw dropped; before he had an opportunity to speak Mrs. DeForest broke in.

"No effect! Hildegarde, just what do you mean?"

"Just what I say, mother. The will doesn't amount to anything, for father is not dead." She stepped back quickly, and put her hand upon the shoulder of the man who sat by the fire. For the first time, Mrs. DeForest's eyes rested upon his figure.

It was no doubt a situation for a dramatist. What could not have been made of such a scene with the proper handling? But Mrs. DeForest did none of

the things that might properly have been expected; she did not faint nor scream, neither did she rush forward to fling her arms about the neck of the unmoved, emotionless figure by the fire. Yet there was no question but that she recognized the man. She merely gasped;—an undignified, common, vulgar gasp, of plain and undiluted astonishment. And then she simply stared.

Gibbs evidently did not grasp the situation. He started to say something; what it was nobody knew, for nobody paid any attention. Mrs. DeForest was slowly going toward the man who sat by the fire. Reaching him, she put a hand, that rather trembled, upon his shoulder.

"Haven," she said, in a quiet voice. "Haven. Don't you know me?"

The man looked up, rather blankly. For a full minute, maybe longer, he looked into the woman's face. Then his pipe slipped from his lips. His face worked strangely, while it was painful fairly to see his eyes. They showed the struggle that must have been going on behind the broad, high forehead; memory's effort to find that one little link that might unite the sudden-snapped chain which would connect him with the old life. Then, all of an instant, a new look came into the eyes. When he spoke it was as simply and as quietly as a little child, running in to its mother after a short hour's play.

"Why, Mary. What are you doing here? In Denver?" Then he glanced about him and sprang to his feet in surprise. The ten years of a lost personality did not exist for him, apparently, at that moment. He was back in Denver, Colorado, where all trace of him had been lost those ten years before. What accident had caused another personality to take possession of this man might never be known. At that moment of reunion with his wife and daughter, no one cared. Perhaps some day science will have definite information regarding dissociation of personality in its various phases; at present we know little more than that such a thing exists. The record of cases is no short one, either.

Professor Gibbs looked on, at first in amazement. Then, as he realized his position, a sort of sneering smile broke about his lips.

"Very dramatic," he said. "And quite a striking case—really remarkable. Well, I must admit that the situation is altered a little. So, I'll be going back; I presume Mrs. DeForest will choose to stay here for the present." He walked close up to Somers. "I shall be at Sanoset, however, for a day or so," he whispered. "Better think things over. I am positive I can read the cipher, and will do so for a reasonable consideration. Better to find the treasure, with a share to me, than not to find it at all, my young friend."

"You forget that we might work out the cipher ourselves," said Somers. The other laughed; evidently he did not think it probable.

"That's possible, of course. However, I'll be at Sanoset for a day or two, should you wish to talk with me." He raised his hat rather sardonically, whirled on his heels, and strode away down the beach. The man's air castle had undoubtedly crumbled, and he may have been very down at heart. But pride, or pluck, would not permit his showing it. He was even whistling as he jumped into his boat and was rowed away, around the point and out of sight.

McLaughlin had risen, and was smiling, if somewhat sadly, in the direction of the DeForest family, withdrawn a little way up the beach. Then he went over and held out his hand to his brother-in-law.

"Thanks for clearing my name," he said. "I appreciate it a great deal, of course. And I've been in the wrong, to have been so bitter against you, all these years. But I couldn't understand why you didn't take Mildred and the baby, instead of letting them drop out of sight so utterly. Seeing poor DeForest there, now, makes it doubly hard for me, though I'm glad for him."

"But I was away when she left with the baby. When I found out I did everything,—searched everywhere. But she dropped out of sight completely after she got to Boston. Think what I went through—she

was my little sister, man. I know you've been through hell, but I had more than a taste of it myself."

"I was in Boston some twenty years ago," put in Skilayton Ray, rather irrelevantly. The two men looked at him, impatient of the interruption, but the dry voice went steadily on. "One day I had a message at my hotel—I was stopping at the Old Quincy House—to come over to a place on Massachusetts Avenue, some lodging house, evidently. I wondered a good deal, but I went over, and found a woman there sick in bed; she was dying. It was a good deal of a shock to me when I recognized her;—she had seen me on the street and found out where I was stopping, and sent for me. No need, is there, to say who it was?"

McLaughlin had clutched the old lawyer's arm with a grip of steel. His face was white—but no whiter than that of Carton.

"She asked me to do something for her. There was a little girl. She didn't know where you had gone, McLaughlin—and if she had wouldn't have tried to reach you, for fear it would have given the officers a clue. But she knew you were innocent. What she wanted to see me for was concerning the little girl. She didn't want to send her to you, Carton, for she said when the baby grew up the people might point at her as the daughter of a thief. So she asked me to take her. She said I looked like a kind man, and that folks said I was good. That she'd trust her baby with

ıe. And for me to bring the little girl up as my ward, ıd never let her know about her folks. The poor oman was dying, and—well, I took oath that I'd do . After she died I took the little girl, and what few ıings her mother had left, and brought her home with ıe. Her mother had given Mildred a new name—Call her Millie Colleen,' she said. 'It's a good name or my poor little Irish girl.'" Ray stopped a moıent; his old eyes were wet. McLaughlin might have ɛen a statue, carved in the hardest of stone.

"As I say, I took oath I'd never let the little girl now about her parents. But some things, and some ırcumstances, will relieve a man from even a solemn ath. This is one of the times." He turned toward ıe fire and called:

"Millie, come over here a minute."

The girl left Tarbox, and came tripping over. She niled up into the old lawyer's face.

"What is it, uncle?" she asked. The old man took er by the hands, and looked down into her laughing yes.

"Millie, a good many times, when you were smaller, ou've asked about your father and mother. I couldn't ɛll you then. I was under a sort of promise, but that romise—well, I think I've been released from that ow. I'll never be able to show you your mother, ıild. For she—well, she's been in Heaven ever since ou were a tiny child. But I can show you your father,

and not under the stain of being a thief, but as an upright and honorable man. This is your father, my dear, Patrick McLaughlin. Lord," to the others, "it's a wonder that none of you've noticed the resemblance. She's her very father over again."

"But she has her mother's eyes," said McLaughlin. He held out his arms, and the half-frightened girl, crying and smiling in a breath, flew into them after one long look. But she still clung to old Ray's hand.

"You'll still be my uncle, won't you?" she cried back, through her tears. "Even if I have just found a father, I want my uncle."

In the excitement of two reunions, naturally there were some that were forgotten—even if only for a few minutes. Somers walked far down the beach, smoking moodily. Tarbox, smiling, yet half glum, watched Millie Colleen (he could not think of her yet by her true name) as she laughed and cried alternately in her father's arms. The two uncles—Carton, the real, whom she did not know, and Ray, the foster, whom she loved—stood by and their eyes were wet. And Hunkus beamed paternally and benevolently upon all alike. It might have been minutes or it might have been hours before the irrepressible Tarbox piped up, and attracted everybody's attention by his words.

"This surely is a joyful day for the Little Clam Island Treasure Company, Inc. Hildegarde finds a father; Mr. DeForest finds a wife; and Millie finds a

father that she didn't know she had. Even I am in luck—for I found my twenty thousand dollars. Though blessed if I can understand that yet; perhaps I never will."

"What's that about twenty thousand dollars?" asked McLaughlin. So Tarbox, remembering that there were several present not familiar with the incidents covering the peculiar loss of the money and its stranger coming to light, went over the thing briefly. McLaughlin laughed a little.

"Remember I've knocked a deal about the world the last twenty years," he said. "Maybe I can help you on this thing. Let me see that bag, will you?"

Tarbox, wondering, brought it out. The older man took it from him, looking the thing over. It was simply an ordinary bag, of yellow leather, heavy and strong. The kind that you see fifty times a day on trains or about railroad stations. McLaughlin glanced inside.

"Tell you one thing," he said suddenly. "I'll bet you didn't buy this bag new—that is, in a regular shop. Am I right?"

Tarbox stared in wonder. "Say, you're on," he cried. "Though how in thunder did you guess that? But I bought it in a second-hand shop; saw the bag in the window as I was going by. Looked a chance to pick up a dandy bag at a low price, so I snapped it up. But I don't see how you knew it."

McLaughlin was fumbling inside the grip; now he grinned.

"You say the envelope with the money was in the back of your toilet-case. Of course it must have slipped out of that into the bag."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised. A thief, opening the bag, wouldn't be apt to look in a toilet-case for money."

"No. Well, did you drop the bag any time, or throw it, before you missed the money?"

Tarbox looked perplexed. He shook his head doubtfully. But Somers had the better memory.

"Sure, Dick. You hurled it into the corner of the office, at the Titus House, that day we registered. That was before I carried the grip up-stairs."

"Ah," said McLaughlin. "I thought so. And when you were awakened in the scramble last night, the bag might have been kicked over again."

Tarbox nodded. He wondered what the man was coming at.

McLaughlin laughed triumphantly. "We pick up some things knocking 'round the globe," he remarked. "Just glance in here, Mr. Tarbox." He held out the bag. But Tarbox was not the only one to look in, for the others were crowding around also. There was a little cry of surprise, in which each voice joined.

For the bag had a false bottom. Less than an inch in height was the space beneath—but amply sufficient

for even a thick letter to lie in—or for jewels, say, or other small packages which one might wish to conceal.

"A smuggler's bag," explained McLaughlin. "Or handy for any one in illicit business—a thief might find such a bag convenient. You have to find the spring before you can lift the bottom; see, then it opens from the middle, back on each side. The inspectors are pretty well on to such things, so the smugglers don't use them so much these days. Somebody got hard up and pawned the bag, and Tarbox happened to buy it;—thus causing himself some hours of worry, I imagine."

"But nobody knew this spring," Tarbox objected.

"No, but the thing is obvious. When you hurled the bag that day it forced something against the spring enough to open it, probably just enough so that the letter slid through. Then in the scramble the other night it slid open again, enough for the envelope to drop out. It's the simplest explanation I can see, and, after all, the probable one. Naturally you did not think of such a thing. You were thinking all the time of thieves. Well, take out your false bottom and you'll have a good little bag—also, no more trouble."

"So endeth another mystery," chanted Millie solemnly. Then her face brightened with a new thought —and she clapped her hands joyously.

"But the ghosts!" she cried. "We know who they were, and where they came from now. But the weird noises—and the lights. You must tell us,—father." She spoke the last word almost hesitatingly, and with diffidence. It still sounded strangely upon her lips.

McLaughlin smiled again. So did several of the others.

"I think the boys suspect," he told her. "Did you ever see a devil's fiddle? It is simply a rosined cord, drawn through a hole in the bottom of an old tin can. Rosin on a thread makes a fearful and wonderful sound also; the old tick-tack of the country boys. Not to mention that the wind, whistling through a bottle placed just right in a tree, makes a nerve-rending noise. As for the lights—well, phosphorus explains that sufficiently. You can do almost anything with phosphorus, coupled with imagination."

His daughter pouted. "After all, these things are so simple when you do find them out," she said.

"I don't know," said Somers. "Take the mystery of Badd's treasure, for instance. We're no nearer finding it than we were in the beginning. Nor will we be until that cipher is read, I'm thinking."

He had made up his mind to one thing, however. If Gideon Badd had left a treasure behind him at all, it might stay undiscovered for another hundred years, before he would call on Professor Gibbs to discover the secret.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEAVIEST PIPE

A NUMBER of deeply interested persons were gathered upon Little Clam Island's beach, and Joseph Hunkus was the one to whom they gave attention. Several ancient volumes—Badd's old books—were piled about his knees. In his lap lay something wrapped carefully in a newspaper, and he had just taken from an inside pocket several close-written sheets of paper. He mopped his forehead with a wet-looking handkerchief as he glanced about the circle with his whimsical smile.

"Never again," he began. "Never will I volunteer for such a task again. Though I have always been interested in ciphers. However—well, let's see what sense this makes." He bent over his papers, finally selecting a sheet. The little audience waited in breathless silence.

"Assuming there was a cipher," he went on, "the first phrase that seemed relevant was, 'See the Book, The Olde Book.' Well, what does that refer to? It designates no particular one of the cipher volumes, and they are all old books. But an understanding of what

Badd meant by such expressions seemed necessary to give us the key. I finally hit upon an idea. Badd was a seafaring man, accustomed to the expressions of sailors. Such men, and particularly in Badd's day, were illiterate fellows, who would know little of books. But there is one book they would be familiar with—that is, they would know of it, and, as such men usually do, regard it with considerable veneration—veneration akin, perhaps, to awe. The expression, 'I'll kiss the Book on it,' is common among such men when they wish to attest the truth of any statement. 'The Book.' Ah, I had my idea then, but the second part bothered me—the qualifying phrase, as it were—'The Olde Book.' I thought I had a clue as to what Badd referred to as 'The Book.' But when he qualified it as 'The Olde Book,' I was bothered. It seemed as if it might refer to some particular book, in which case we were at sea again, unless we possessed some identical volume to which he referred. Then all at once the old pirate's meaning dawned on me, and how absurdly simple it seemed—just as all cipher-keys seem simple after one has discovered them. Then, through the kindness of good Mrs. Chandler, I obtained this. She hesitated about letting me bring it over here to the island; only upon a solemn promise of the greatest possible care would she consent. Witness these thick newspapers—this careful wrapping." He began to undo the package in his lap, and brought to light at

length a heavy, thick-covered volume, bound with brass clasps. Gilded letters appeared upon its broad front cover. Hunkus laid the volume down before him.

"A Bible!" gasped Tarbox.

"Yes, the Bible," corrected Hunkus. "You see, of course. 'The Book.' And the qualifying phrase, 'The Olde Book.' What could that refer to but the older part of this Bible—the Old Testament, in fact? Badd had no intention of being blasphemous;—is it blasphemy to keep the family record of births and deaths in the front page of a family Bible? He simply took the old Book as a key for his cipher. It rather complicated matters; for one ordinarily would think, and reasonably, too, that his opening phrases referred to some book in this old series—Quarnoton's Scientific Work—in which the various parts of the cipher were contained."

The editor glanced about the little circle. As no one offered any comment, he continued.

"Take the second sentence. 'The Treasure is Book Fifth—Thirtyfour six third.' That could mean but one thing; some part of the cipher was contained in the fifth book of this Old Testament. And the numbers, going upon such an assumption, could refer only to chapter or page and verse. The last number puzzled me at first; I could see no need for that. Say 'Thirty-four' meant the thirty-fourth chapter of the Fifth

Book. 'Six' would mean undoubtedly the sixth verse. But the last number, 'third'; what could that be? Then I found the proper place, and—simply counted the words in that verse. And I had what I needed—the thing missing in that sentence. Listen." He turned the pages of the old Bible rapidly until he found his place. "The word was 'buried'—and now the sentence reads, 'The Treasure is buried.' Well, the rest was comparatively easy. And here is the translation:

> "'See the Book. The Olde Book. The Treasure is buried. On Littel Clam Ileand, In the Secret cave. Behind the Sink. Look under the Pipes From the well of water. And Turn Towards the Frunt of the house. But not so Farr as the pit. Thare you will Find Itt. Iff you can Read this.'

"And there is your cipher solved. Illiterate spelling and poor punctuation do not matter. Simply look under the pipes, behind the sink (probably in the old kitchen) that ran from the well. Probably there is some tunnel there. Then turn toward the front of the house, but not so far as the pit. 'Thare you will Find Itt.' What can 'Itt' refer to but the treasure? 'Iff you can Read this,' writes old Gideon Badd. Ironical old rascal. Can't you see him grinning now as he puts that down in his crabbed old fist? Then he sends it to his old mate, 'Who turned Chicken-harted,' telling him

that perhaps Bridger's new-found religion (at which the old pirate flings a taunting sneer) may keep away the curse from the ill-gotten wealth. Bridger evidently believed in the curse as much as Badd, for he never went after the treasure. And the curse seemed to follow Gideon Badd all right enough—if, as tradition says, he perished miserably in the fire that destroyed his old mansion." Hunkus pointed at the crumbling ruins upon the hillside.

"And that's just it," put in Somers. "The house is gone. And the kitchen-sink; how can we tell now where that stood? If there was a well once, it must have been blocked up years ago—there are no signs of one now. Then this pit Badd speaks of; what could that have been?"

"I have thought of that last," said Hunkus. "Probably he did not find the word 'cellar' and used 'pit' instead. That would make sense. Some passageway under the pipes that ran from well to sink; then follow this passageway toward the front of the house, but not so far as the cellar."

"Or perhaps he referred to the pit under the cellar, that DeForest and I have been digging in," said McLaughlin. "But I am positive it is solid ledge behind that pit. We can approximate the old kitchen's location and search for the pipes, though. I see nothing else to do."

It was easy enough to ascertain the probable loca-

tion of the old mansion's kitchen. But if Hunkus had read the cipher correctly, it was here that the puzzle began. For the ground to the rear of the ruins was solid ledge, covered by only a few inches of scrawny soil, too shallow to hold the roots of stunted grass, much less to conceal water-pipes. And there was certainly no well upon the island, or any signs of one that had been filled in by the process of time. To Somers, however, pondering as he searched, came another idea.

"We know there's a spring of water back in the edge of the woods," he told them. "Wonder if that could be Gideon's well. He would have hardly made things too easy—providing he thought his cipher would be solved. And it looks like an old spring; maybe it was piped to the house at one time."

They began to dig near the spring, and several active men, even if unaccustomed to the work, can remove considerable soil when spurred by sufficient motive. It was Tarbox who first struck into something solid, as the dull thud of his pick indicated. But he shook his head in disgust to their look of inquiry.

"Nothing like a water-pipe," he exclaimed. "Only a rotten old log."

"Great Scott," cried McLaughlin, with a broad grin. "What do you expect to find, my boy? This pipe we're looking for was laid more than eighty years ago. They didn't use iron much, or brass, either, in those days. Water-pipes were made from logs—often

cedar logs—with a hole drilled through from end to end for the water to run in. Let's look at what you have got there?"

He reached down his shovel, and, with some tugging and straining, a hollow log came slowly up from the bed in which it had rested so long. It was rotten outside, true—but, all things considered, a solid thing indeed to have withstood its eighty years underground. McLaughlin, excited now, pointed out the hole that drilled it from end to end.

"It's an old water-pipe," he exclaimed, "through which water ran from the spring to the house, more than a man's lifetime ago. Well, we've struck the first pipe. Sight a straight line from here to the old walls now, and dig under it, near the ruins. And I bet we strike other pipes."

He spoke truly. A half hour's digging near the wall and along a line from the hillside spring to the wall's side where the old ell had stood, brought to light another pipe. The men, excited, dug furiously now until a line of ancient log pipes was uncovered, leading up to and through the wall. But nothing was beneath the lengths of pipe, though they hauled out each one in turn. Only the hard-baked earth upon which this old-style pipe line had lain for nearly a century. Yet Gideon Badd's cipher had said to look beneath and under the pipes.

Upon the cellar side the wall had toppled in and lay

—a great heap of ponderous blocks of stone. Ordinarily one would have called it an impossible task to slide these great boulders aside. But now a little group of sweating men performed wonders, until the earthen floor of the old cellar was uncovered. It was harder digging in this flinty ground, that blunted sharp-pointed picks and turned the edges of heavy spades. But, turn by turn, first Somers and Tarbox, then McLaughlin and DeForest, and then Squire Ray and Hunkus, they dug on and down, in spite of blistered hands and aching muscles, nor minding the flight of hours any more than they did their fatigue. Finally their labor was rewarded; somebody's shovel struck against another log pipe. Half an hour later there lay uncovered three lengths of hollowed logs, joined end to end, and apparently bricked in, though the bricks had crumbled and broken long ago. But these pipes, too, lay upon hard-baked earth; there was nothing underneath in the way of tunnel, certainly. McLaughlin straightened up with a discouraged look.

"Was old Badd a practical joker, I wonder?" he snapped. "Sure, here is his line of pipes. They might have run into a sink at one time; of course, that's gone long ago. And these pipes turn toward the old front of the house, too. And they run in the general direction of the sub-cellar, which might have been the old pit the man spoke of. Sure it's all right so far. But look under the pipes, he directs. Well, what

for? There's nothing under them but more hard earth, such as we've near broken our backs digging through to-day. It looks like a hoax to me;—maybe he thought to play a practical joke on his old mate, to whom he sent the cipher. Well, I'm done." He wiped his sweating forehead and started to climb out of their ditch.

"Well, let's die game, anyway," said Somers. "There's one more length we haven't looked under. Lend a hand, Dick, and we'll tip this last log over before we quit."

"I'll go you," answered Tarbox. "Though we'll find no more under this one." They tugged and heaved, and finally stirred the piece of cedar pipe a few inches to one side. But underneath there was only hard-baked ground.

"There, what did I tell you, Chick?" he groaned. "Well, I'll follow the others. Why, what the devil are you up to, anyway?" He glanced in surprise at his old chum. For Somers, a peculiar expression upon his face, had reached for an axe. He swung it high above his head, then cut several vicious, whacking blows at the old cedar log.

"Good way to work off temper," commented Tarbox. And then he broke into a long, shrill whistle of surprise. A minute after, aroused by his loud cry, all the rest of the party—both women and men—came running to the edge of the ditch to stare down in won-

der at Tarbox, shouting exultantly, and Somers leaning, breathless but mightily pleased, upon his axe.

For the long-hid treasure of Gideon Badd had come to the light at last. It lay there in the hollow of the last cedar log that Somers had split wide open. No mere water-pipe this, but a veritable treasure trove. From end to end the log was filled with little bags of gold coin. It was plain to be seen, for some of the bags had rotted, so that the coins were bursting through. A fortune indeed, as a glance would have told. And at one end lay a long, narrow, wooden box, unlocked, for Somers raised the cover as easily as his trembling hands would allow. The rays of the sinking sun, flashing down over the edge of their deep ditch, struck into this box in flashing, dazzling reflections. For precious stones of dazzling colors were here; some shining and scintillating brilliantly—like diamonds; others soft, shimmering, as, for example, a string of splendid pearls that was coiled conspicuously upon the top in that treasure chest. There were jewels in splendid settings and others unset. There were stones that displayed cunning, even marvelous workmanship, lying there besides others, more valuable, maybe, while yet uncut. Rings that very likely had been wrenched from white fingers, while soft voices wept in fear or implored in desperation, were in that box. There were curiously carved or twisted bracelets that had no

doubt been unclasped from soft arms, and necklaces that strong, ruthless, and probably dirty hands had snatched from off white throats while the rightful owners trembled in most horrible fear. There were gems there that a rough pirate like Badd would not have appreciated and could have had no conception of their values,—mosaics, cameos, and intaglios, most splendidly and exquisitely cut and carved. The jewels and gems in the long narrow box alone must have represented a vast fortune; and then when one also considered the gold! No wonder that Somers closed the jewel casket softly and sat limply down beside the split log. And the others were silent, too—as much overcome as was he. It was Tarbox, always the irrepressible, who finally asked the question.

"How did you happen to do it, Chick? What made you think of splitting open the log?"

Somers laughed. "Yet you helped raise the other log pipes," he said, "and did not notice how hard this last one was to stir;—we could not raise it, but barely shoved it aside an inch or so. It was the heaviest pipe. No mere cedar log, hollowed for water to run through, could have been as heavy. And you see why Badd said, 'Look under the pipes.' Not that there was anything beneath them. But in looking under, one would have to move them, which gave the chance, for whoever looked, to see how much heavier this last pipe was than the rest."

"And the secret cave—where is that?" asked Hildegarde.

Somers shrugged. "Hidden somewhere in front, under these old ruins, probably," he answered. "This pipe line probably ran into such a cave, opening off the old cellar. Perhaps we might find it if we dug, but what use? Who knows but that Gideon Badd, trapped in his house by fire, sought safety in his secret cave and was blocked in by the falling ruins? His body was never found. And I shouldn't be surprised if whoever dug into such a cave might find his skeleton." He laughed. "Of course, that is just a fancy," he continued. But his wife shuddered.

"Then certainly let us not investigate," she said. "We may be satisfied with his treasure without disturbing his resting-place, I am sure."

That evening, as the others sat around the fire, Tarbox and Millie Colleen strolled into the little circle of light from the blaze. The girl's face was flushed and rosy. She went straight to her father and put both arms about his neck. Then she held out one soft hand to Skilayton Ray. Tarbox was fumbling in an inside pocket; at length he drew out a thick envelope that the others all recognized. He walked over to Millie and held it out to her, while the others stared.

"What's that for?" asked McLaughlin. Tarbox tried to smile, but made rather a failure of it. The young man was nervous.

"I'm rather careless with money, you know," he explained. "So I thought I'd let my—er—future wife hold the bank. With your permission, of course, Mr. McLaughlin?"

"What?" cried Skilayton Ray. McLaughlin said nothing, though perhaps he smiled just a bit sadly. The others gasped, then applauded. And Millie Colleen, smiling yet tearful, slipped the thick envelope away somewhere out of sight.

Under cover of the applause Somers and Hildegarde had slipped away, unnoticed, into the shadows. They were both very serious. The girl twirled a plain gold ring rather nervously upon one finger. The man, fidgeting a little, finally spoke.

"Dick, as usual, had his nerve with him. Well, he's made good, I guess. Dick always was a fortunate devil."

The girl sighed. "Their romance is just beginning," she said, "while ours—but I forget; ours was a business proposition. And—well, now the business is ended, isn't it? So," her voice was very low, "you can have your freedom, Mr. Somers."

"If I want it," he answered. "But supposing I don't?" He hardly dared look at her, but he forced himself to meet her eyes. One look was enough.

It was quite dark out there on the beach, so perhaps the man-in-the-moon, usually reputed such a sharp-eyed personage, may be pardoned for his mistake.

For as his yellow globe swung up into the heavens over the dim horizon's edge, that individual, sometimes thought mythical, looked down to see how everything was going upon old earth below. He saw the dark blur on the beach of Little Clam Island, and it was then he made his mistake. For—he wondered what one person might be doing all alone, far off from the fire, upon that lonely stretch of sand. Well, it would have taken far sharper eyes than yours, good old man-in-the-moon, to have told that there were two persons, instead of one, in that shadowy blur.

FINIS